



Mr. Adams's Last Crusade: The Extraordinary Post-presidential Life of John Quincy Adams

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Following his single term as President of the United States (1825–1829), John Quincy Adams, embittered by his loss to Andrew Jackson, boycotted his successor's inauguration, just as his father John Adams had done (the only two presidents ever to do so). Rather than retire, the sixty-two-year-old former president, U.S. senator, secretary of state, and Harvard professor was elected by his Massachusetts friends and neighbors to the House of Representatives to throw off the "incubus of Jacksonianism." It was the opening chapter in what was arguably the most remarkable post-presidency in American history. In this engaging biography, historian Joseph Wheelan describes Adams's battles against the House Gag Rule that banished abolition petitions; the removal of Eastern Indian tribes; and the annexation of slave-holding Texas, while recounting his efforts to establish the Smithsonian Institution. As a "man of the whole country," Adams was not bound by political party, yet was reelected to the House eight times before collapsing at his "post of duty" on February 21, 1848, and then dying in the House Speaker's office. His funeral evoked the greatest public outpouring since Benjamin Franklin's death.

Mr. Adams's Last Crusade will enlighten and delight anyone interested in American history.

Mr. Adams's Last Crusade: The Extraordinary Post-presidential Life of John Quincy Adams Details

Date : Published January 29th 2008 by PublicAffairs (first published January 8th 2008)

ISBN : 9780786720125

Author : Joseph Wheelan

Format : Hardcover 309 pages

Genre : History, Biography, Politics, Presidents, North American Hi..., American History, Nonfiction

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From Reader Review Mr. Adams's Last Crusade: The Extraordinary Post-presidential Life of John Quincy Adams for online ebook

Bruce says

So I read John Adams and then watched the marvelous HBO mini-series based on it (twice, the second time with the kids of course), and in each case came away with a bit of curiosity about Adams' oldest son. That would be John Quincy Adams, America's sixth president and second one-termer – just like his dad! Mr. Adams' Last Crusade is sort of a Cliff's Notes bio of JQA; it blitzes through his rise to and through the presidency in the first 80 pages (well-trod material, that), and then settles into an easy early-19th century groove, glossing the tensions arising from slavery in the 1830's and 1840's, with a bit of Smithsonian history thrown in for good measure.

Wheelan paints a portrait of John Quincy Adams as a man born and groomed in the image of his father: a self-important, know-it-all pedant, a man born and groomed to statesmanship who would have preferred a life in letters to the law if his parents had let him get away with it. He was apparently a shrewd and superior diplomat, though why these skills failed to translate into his performance as a senator, president, or member of Congress is unclear. If at all soft-spoken abroad, at home he proved to be a man who in lieu of compromise preferred rubbing his intellect obnoxiously in others' face; someone so arrogant and politically tone-deaf as to name Henry Clay Secretary of State after Clay decisively deferred his own presidential ambitions to Adams' in 1824 despite Clay's prescient and outspoken concerns that such a nomination would lend credence to charges of their having made a corrupt bargain; a man who preferred hectoring fellow members of Congress and playing with parliamentary rules to consensus building or even momentarily contemplating partisan gambits to effect desired policy. (Heaven forfend his ego should permit him to stoop so low.)

The passage that I think best exemplifies Adams as a big, lovable dork appears at p. 47, with Adams' pathetic performance of mundane presidential duty:

At a Baltimore banquet to commemorate the city's repulse of the British during the War of 1812, Adams offered a toast to "Ebony and Topaz – General Ross' posthumous coat of arms, and the republican militiamen who gave it." Observing the confusion on his listeners' faces, the president attempted to explain that the allusion was to a Voltaire story, "Le Blanc et le Noir," ...{but evidently no one had read Voltaire's depiction of Ebony as the spirit of evil, and Topaz as the good spirit, transmogrified in Adams's toast to General Robert Ross, whose coat of arms was embellished by the king after Ross's death outside Baltimore, and the "good" American militia.... Yet, at small dinner parties he could be surprisingly animated and urbane, and when he wished, he could impress his guests with his stories and his knowledge of wines.

Wines?! Small wonder Americans threw him over for the fascist Indian-killer, Andrew Jackson. Among other things, Tennessee's stonewall was a whiskey man.*

Still, you could argue that Adams was but a byproduct of his upbringing. John and Abigail do not hesitate to remind young John Quincy of the unique networking and educational advantages the elder Adamses offer him by dragging him round the patriot circle in Philadelphia and late 18th century European capitals, nor to threaten him to meet their lofty expectations. Imagine being a teenager away from home and getting letters

from Mom telling you she'd rather see you come home in a casket than hear you'd been (even momentarily) an embarrassment. Or as a 15-year-old to be invited by America's new ambassador to Russia to act as secretary/translator, only to get Dad's merely reluctant permission along with a strict admonition not to screw up. Thanks for the vote of confidence, folks.

Why didn't the elder Adamses simply point to Uncle William or brother Charles, each of whom squandered their lives and meager fortunes on alcoholism? Alcoholism and depression ran tragically in each of the Adams-Smith families. Both John Quincy's brothers succumbed to excessive drink as did one of his own sons (George), and John Quincy struggled with periodic bouts of bed-confining melancholy.

So Adams finds himself out of work for the first time in a long time in 1828 after Martin van Buren engineers a hatchet job of an election that ushers in the questionable era of Jacksonian democracy. Fortunately, Adams wasn't forced long to ruminate on the nonleadership he put toward his infrastructure-building presidential agenda. The proud support and appeals to vanity of the residents of Quincy, Massachusetts, overrode the objections of his wife and eldest son to render him the freshman Representative of the 8th District as a sprightly 63 year old, a post he would not relinquish until his death in office (heck, in the very Capitol Building) some 17 years later.

Wheelan's book divides the nearly two decades of Adams' activities as an outspoken burr in the saddle of the slaveholding South into bite-sized, if impersonal chunks. He skillfully summarizes Adams' crusade against the Gag Rule, starting with the abolitionist self-organization that gave rise first to mass antislavery petitions, then the adoption of a standing rule in the House to ignore petitions and petitioners, the attrition of popular tolerance of the Rule, and finally its repeal. He offers up a whole chapter's-worth on the *Amistad* case, the trial of American-captured mutinous Spanish slaves that ended with Adams' successful Supreme Court defense and some years later, after a barnstorming fundraising tour, their return home to Ghana. However, by contrast with these tidy mini-narratives, Wheelan's consideration of arguments and events leading up to and through the annexation of Texas come across a bit hazier, as is Wheelan's depiction of the gradual evolution of Adams' views on the abolition of slavery.

As I mentioned above, Wheelan also tosses in Adams' 12-year role as steward of the James Smithson bequest. Per Wheelan, Adams was instrumental in protecting the legacy that would lead to the founding of the Smithsonian by way of his absolute refusal to let it be spent on any initiative other than an astronomical observatory (a forward-looking initiative which no one at the time really cared about). Fortunately for the Smithsonian, Adams was persuaded in the 11th hour (well, year) that such an observatory would prove redundant to the Naval Observatory already in place. Unfortunately, Wheelan has nothing to say about Adams' part (did he have any?) in making Congress appropriate funds equivalent to the amounts squandered by investment in worthless state treasury instruments, the Congressional charter itself, or on the founding philosophy and development of the Institution once its establishment was finally secured.

C'est la. I found this book to be a diverting read, and one which fully satisfied the curiosity sowed by David McCullough and HBO. What's more, I appreciated Wheelan's vivid portrait of Martin van Buren as a master Machiavellian and chief Adams antagonist. However, it's ridiculous to compare Wheelan's and McCullough's work. Wheelan lacks McCullough's depth, sweep, and vision; his work – like this review – is more akin to Wikipedia's JQA article. There's little here on Adams' friends and family, on his home life, or much context outside of the content I have summarized. So notwithstanding that I enjoyed the book, I would have to assume that there are other works which more fully capture John Quincy Adams, the people, and the times of the 1830's and 1840's. If you come across one you really like, please let me know.

(*N.B. - Not Confederate General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, though for all I know he was a whiskey drinker, too. Just one on the wrong side of history. I wouldn't have put *him* on the twenty dollar bill either.)

Sarah says

On the whole, a fairly decent book with a compelling argument for why John Quincy Adams should be remembered. It has a concise biographical resume for JQA's life up through his presidency, and then settles in for the main thesis: the look at his life post-presidency, particularly his work in Congress.

An otherwise well-written book, it is weakened by its jumps around in time (sometimes paragraph to paragraph) and the author's habit of repeating some of his facts and points, sometimes multiple times. In a longer book, one might not notice, but this one is only 309 pages including the footnotes, et al, and so the repetition is annoying and unnecessary. The epilogue is particularly guilty of said repetition, transforming what should be the crowning moment of the book into something more reminiscent of a high school essay.

This book could have easily been 4 stars with a better editor. However, it was still worth the read, and far better than the last biography of JQA that I read.

Jim says

This is an excellent account of John Quincy Adams' "second career" as a member of the U.S. Congress. He served in the House for 17 years, from 1831 to 1848.

Adams is often regarded as a "failed president," largely because of his refusal to "play" politics, to wield his powers of patronage within the Federal Government. As a result, he, like his father, served only a single term as President, losing to Andrew Jackson in a bitter election in 1828. Yet less than two years later, Adams was elected by the voters in his congressional district as their representative. They re-elected him time and again right up to his final term. He, fittingly, died in the Capital itself, having suffered a terminal stroke while sitting at his desk on the House floor.

As the author points out very admirably, Adams became the conscience of the House of Representatives: he opposed slavery openly; he defended the right of citizens to present petitions to the Congress (a right that was blocked by a "Gag Rule" in the House for eight years by representatives from the South, who did not want to accommodate any anti-slavery petitions), he opposed the forced movement of Eastern Native Americans, like the Cherokees to lands beyond the Mississippi, he opposed the annexation of Texas for fear that it would mean the expansion of slavery in the United States (which it did), he defended before the Supreme Court the slaves of the ship Amistad, successfully winning his case that the men were not property, but were kidnapped individuals who forcibly overwhelmed their captors. All of this is a remarkable record; the fact that Adams accomplished all of this after the age of 64, when others of his generation had long retired is truly remarkable.

Jeremy Perron says

As explained by the title, Joseph Wheelan's book covers the second President Adams' career as a member of

the U.S. House of Representatives. Most presidents who have served in the House of Representatives did so at an earlier stage in their careers. (Examples: James Madison, John F. Kennedy, and George H.W. Bush.) Their House membership was a stepping-stone on the way to bigger and better things. John Quincy Adams however became a member of House after he was President of the United States. While many see this as a huge demotion, Wheelan explains that in many ways Adams was freer than ever to conduct himself in the manner that he thought a statesman should act: on principle not politics.

"Besides being arguably Congress's most learned member--and undoubtedly the oldest--Adams was also one of the most resilient and hard-working of the representatives, often the first to take his seat and the last to leave. When the House recessed for dinner and then resumed work that continued into the night, Adams found it agreeable to spend the hour, while his colleagues dined at their lodgings, in a House conference room, writing letters while consuming five or six small crackers and a glass or water. 'I am calm and composed for the evening session, and far better prepared for taking part in any debate than after the most temperate dinner at home or abroad.' (p.137)

Congressman Adams had strong beliefs and he would stand up for what was right not what was popular. Despite this he never challenged slavery, until slavery challenged him. He might not have turned it into his private war if it had not been for the South's foolish attempts to shut down even the discussion of slavery. In his battle against the gag rule Adams became the defender of many unpopular causes.

"Adams had become the de facto chief spokesman for many of those denied a voice in government--abolitionists silenced by the Gag Rule, slaves, Indians, and finally, women. One may ask why Adams took on this role, but a better question is, Why did he have no company? Almost alone among his fellow congressmen, all a generation his junior or more, Adams believed in and upheld the principles of the Founding Fathers embodied in the individual liberties of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, in the soaring words of the Declaration of Independence, and in the antiquated ethic, which went by the board with his father's defeat in 1800, of nonpartisanship and selfless public service." (p.150)

Adams even became a defender of women's involvement in political life. Although not a suffragist, he fought for the basic human right to speak and be heard. The women that he was defending were members of the abolitionist movement. Their participation in this movement would later lead to the beginnings of the suffragist movement.

"Congressman Benjamin Howard of Maryland aroused Adams's indignation by declaring that women did not belong in 'the fierce struggles of political life,' but in the home. Adams had provoked Howard's assertion by presenting a petition signed by women opposed to annexing Texas. Before Adams had finished responding to Howard's pronouncement, Howard must have wished that he had not said anything at all." (p.150-1)

One of the most famous of cases that was argued by Adams was in defense of the African prisoners of the Amistad who had rioted in their cause for freedom. Adams was originally unsure whether or not he should even do it for he had not argued in front of the Supreme Court in decades. He nevertheless proved victorious and the captured Africans went free.

"Adams, arguably the greatest American secretary of state, scorned Forsyth's eagerness to cooperate with Spain's 'inadmissible and insolent demands. His voice dripping with sarcasm, Adams said the Spanish minister wished the president to use 'absolute fiat' to pluck the Africans from the courts and sent them to Cuba. 'Is the Khan of Tartary possessed of a power to meet demands like these? I know not where on the globe we should look for any such authority, unless it be with the Governor General of Cuba with respect to negroes.'" (p.181)

"Adams asked the justices to imagine that the Amistad was an American vessel with a cargo of African slaves that had tied up at a U.S. port. 'The captain would be seized, tried as a pirate and hung! And every person concerned, either as owners or on board the ship would be severely punished.'" (p.182)

The passion that John Quincy Adams had for the causes that he felt were in the right impressed even some of his enemies. It kind of reminds me of Pope Sixtus V wishing that Queen Elizabeth I was a Catholic queen.

"Even Adams's Southern adversaries grudgingly professed admiration for his intellectual and rhetorical gifts. 'They call Adams a man of one idea,' South Carolina Congressman Isaac Holmes was heard to say, 'but I tell you what it is, he has got more ideas than all of us put together.' South Carolina Congressman Francis Pickens remarked, 'Well that is the most extraordinary man on God's footstool.' Even Marshall, badly mauled by Adams rhetorical onslaught, granted that if somehow Adams could be removed or silenced on the subject of slavery, 'none other, I believe, could be found hardy enough, or bad enough, to fill his place.'" (p.201)

In the my review of the previous book I had read on Mr. Adams, I stated that presidents were always incredible statesmen but they were not always successful as president. John Quincy Adams' time as president was a failure but this book will show you that John Quincy Adams' career was a success.

Amy Pizzarello says

Not an easy read for me, but the history is well worth the effort. A fascinating and inspiring story.

Nancy says

I have become a huge John Quincy fan, and the more I learn about him the more impressed I become. When I found Mr Adam's Last Crusade: John Quincy Adam's Extraordinary Post-Presidential Life in Congress I had to read it. And I did, in three sittings. Wheelan has written an inspiring book, offering a concise overview of JQ's early career and a moving study of his time in the House.

After a failed presidency he expected a peaceful retirement at Big House, the home of his parents, reunited with his library of 6,000 books.

Then he was elected to the House of Representatives. "My election as President of the United States was not so half so gratifying to my inmost soul" he wrote. And he quoted his hero Cicero, "I will not desert in my old age the Republic that I defended in my youth."

JQ was a throw back to another world, the world of the Founding Fathers and the Declaration of Independence, when duty and freedom of speech and sacrifice were not just ideas. He eschewed political favoritism and party politics. It made him unpopular. His intelligence and prodigious memory, paired with a sharp wit and verbal prowess, made him a formidable enemy.

"Slavery is a slow poison to the morals of any community infected with it. Ours is infected with it to the

vitals."JQA

64 years old in 1831, JQ took up arms to battle what he believed was the greatest threat to America: slavery. The House had enacted a 'gag' on all discussion of slavery and JQ was determined to end it. It took eight years. He was vilified, his life threatened, the House tried to silence him. Every day he walked to work and brought up petitions that brought the wrath of the House and the South upon his head.

He became friends with abolitionists Theodore Weld and Angelina Grimke' Weld. JQ had been anti-slavery since 1820, but now became a self-avowed abolitionist.

"...the acutest, the astutest, the archeast enemy of Southern slavery that ever existed." Representative Wise of Virginia

He voted against the main on other issues. He was no believer in expansionism, especially if it meant expanding slavery into new states and if it meant taking lands away from rightful owners. He was against the removal and extermination of Native Americans. He fought for the James Smithson legacy to be used as it was meant, resulting in the Smithsonian Institute. He voted to ban dueling. He even defended women's right to petition.

"They call Adams a man of one idea, but I tell you what it is, he had got more ideas than all of us put together." South Carolina Congressman Isaac Holmes

Then there was the Amistad trial. Don't rely on the Spielberg movie to learn about JQ's involvement or the importance of the trial. Read this book.

JQ was getting old, his hand was palsied, his eyes wept, he had rheumatism. He would not give up because there was no one to take his place. His eyes still burned with passion and vitality. His mind was as sharp as ever. And he was at the height of his popularity.

He suffered a series of mild strokes, clung to his faith, and waited for the inevitable. On February 21, 1848 he was in the House when he suffered a stroke. All Washington closed down as "America's last living link between the present day and the fading Revolutionary War era of Washington lay dying in the U. S. Capitol" (from Mr Adam's Last Crusade). On February 23 he died in the House Speaker's chamber.

In his day he was already an anachronism, a man without party loyalty, an original thinker, an independent voter without consideration of his own political or personal capital. His soul was rooted in the days of the Revolution when he watched the Battle of Bunker Hill with his mom and accompanied his father John Adams to Paris. He had known Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe, Dolley Madison. He lived into an America growing from the Industrial Revolution and clamoring for more land and more wealth. His questioning but firm faith was old fashioned in a time of Transcendentalism. JQ was America's better angel, a voice for the core values of it's foundation.

Has there ever been another like him?

Steve says

<http://bestpresidentialbios.com/2013/...>

“Mr. Adams’s Last Crusade: John Quincy Adams’s Extraordinary Post-Presidential Life in Congress” is author Joseph Wheelan’s 2008 biography of our sixth president. Wheelan, an Associated Press reporter for over two decades, is the author of six books including two on Thomas Jefferson.

Unlike most John Quincy Adams biographies, Wheelan focuses not on Adams’s unsuccessful term as president but, instead, on his unique and remarkably successful post-presidential career in Congress. Most authors have chosen the more natural story – focusing on his precocious youth and his productive years as a public servant leading to his one term as president. Wheelan chose to focus on possibly the more compelling, and interesting, storyline.

While previous presidents retired to lives of farming and philosophizing, John Quincy Adams was convinced by his Massachusetts neighbors to run for a seat in Congress following his departure from the White House (much to the chagrin of his family). What he assumed would be a short-lived stint in the House – and a chance to regain his good standing and reputation – resulted in an unprecedented, and still unmatched, record of public service following his service as president.

Despite the book’s almost exclusive focus on JQA’s final two decades of life and public service, the author does endeavor to familiarize the reader with Adams’s first sixty-two years in order to set the background and provide historical context. Wheelan does this with perhaps too much efficiency, covering Adams’s life up through his time as secretary of state in fewer than forty pages. Adams’s presidency is handled in only twenty or so pages. The remaining 80% of the book is devoted to his post-presidential public (but not private) life.

Wheelan does a nice job writing the book in “plain English,” devoid of fancy words and complex sentence structures. He efficiently summarizes complex historical events, making them both interesting and comprehensible to even a casual reader. Well-described are Adams’s key projects during his time in Congress including removing the Gag Rule and ensuring the right of petition (particularly as it concerned slavery) and establishing the Smithsonian Institution. During these years, Adams also agreed to argue the Amistad case before the Supreme Court. His efforts in this case were successful, and Wheelan’s summary of the case was the sharpest and clearest I’ve read.

What this biography does not accomplish is clear from its title: it is not a comprehensive recounting of Adams’s life; it does not examine or diagnose his failed presidency (not in detail, anyway). For the most part, the book does not explore his personal life including his relationship with his parents, his wife or his children. These facets of his life are touched upon, so as not to be ignored, but not dealt with in any real detail. As a result, the reader comes away with a fuller appreciation (and respect) for Adams’s post-presidential public life, but no real sense of who he was as a private person.

Strictly judged as a presidential biography, Wheelan’s book is somewhat lacking. But as a examination of Adams’s final years, a time when he sought and largely received redemption in the eyes of his contemporaries (if not history), this book is highly successful. In hindsight, I cannot imagine really understanding John Quincy Adams without having read “Mr. Adams’s Last Crusade.”

Overall Rating: 4 stars

Mahlon says

For 35 years, John Quincy Adams served his country selflessly in several capacities including, Diplomat, Senator, Secretary of State, and 6th President of the U.S. The consensus among historians seems to be that Adams' one-term in office was a failure, largely due to his perceived "corrupt bargain" with Henry Clay. He left office isolated and unpopular. He could have easily retired to Massachusetts and lived out his life as a gentleman farmer. Thankfully for us, he decided to heed the call of his friends and neighbors and enter the House of Representatives. At 64, he was the oldest of 89 Freshman when he began serving in 1831. He died in his seat in 1848. It's these 17 years that are subject of Mr. Adams Last Crusade. Joseph Wheelan uses Adams' career as a jumping off point to discuss the entire Jacksonian Age, illuminating many of the critical flash points faced by politicians of this era. These included Slavery, Nullification, Indian removal and treatment, the Annexation of Texas and War with Mexico, and the settlement of the Oregon Territory. On most of these issues Adams led the principled opposition, regularly infuriating his southern counterparts. In addition he also chaired the committee in charge of spending James Smithson's \$500,000 bequest. Thanks to Adams' recommendations and tireless championing The Smithsonian Institution was founded in 1846.

One wonders how he ever found the time to consult on the Amistad case. This book contains the clearest synopsis of the issues involved in the case that I've read.

When he died in 1848 at age 80, he was mourned by supporters and opponents alike, many considered him to be the greatest man of the age, and that's saying a lot considering who his contemporaries were.

I've read many Biographies of Presidents and Politicians, and this well written, informative gem ranks right up there near the top. It's my hope that it does for JQA what McCollugh's Biography did for his father. Wheelan is slightly repetitive at times, but you'll barely notice as you are swept away by his engaging narrative.

Nick says

Excellent book. Focuses mostly on his years after his presidency, while he was in Congress. Like his father, he was a man of principals and did great things for this country, but was a poor President. Neither men were very political therefor had few allies in congress. JQ held the Constitution as sacred, and constantly argued against any ruling or act that would go against it or the rights of any citizen, whether he agreed with it or not.

Interesting fact: he abhorred slavery and spent most of his years in Congress trying to abolish it. He foresaw the Civil War. He suffered a massive stroke on the floor of Congress in front of Freshman Rep from Illinois, Abraham Lincoln. He died in the Speaker's Chambers a few days later

Dale says

bl have found a new hero from history

I've known about John Quincy Adams's post-Presidential career ever since I read *Profiles In Courage* by JFK many, many years ago. However, what I most remember about that description of him was that he argued against slavery in the Congress when he could have just coasted along in a comfortable political semi-retirement.

Joseph Wheelan does us all a favor by elaborating on John Quincy Adams's amazing career in this well-written, informative book. Wheelan briefly covers John Quincy Adams's early career in the first 65 pages. As a teenager, John Quincy Adams was an assistant to his father while he was an ambassador to Europe during the Revolutionary War. He served as ambassador to several European countries after the War and also as Secretary of State (the Monroe Doctrine is as much his as Monroe's) and finally President.

Oddly enough, that amazing career was only a prelude to his final post - Representative from Massachusetts in the U.S. Congress. He reports to Congress at age 64. Adams was vaguely opposed to slavery but was very much in favor of the rights to free speech and petition. The Congress was avoiding any discussion of the topic of slavery, including ignoring all petitions to end slavery in Washington, D.C. (Congress administers the District of Columbia so it could have outlawed slavery within it by simple passage of a law).

Adams was indignant that a basic part of the Bill of Rights was being ignored so he began to...

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Matthew says

I had been told long ago in a college history class John Quincy Adams was a rarity because after being a president he went on to serve as a representative for the state of Massachusetts. What became clear from reading this book was J.Q. Adams worked off of his principled beliefs instead of pandering to political interests. He did more to fight slavery than many who seem to be held higher. He even defended women's efforts to participate in the political process. What is great about the book is it focused primarily on his 17 year career as a representative and didn't focus on his presidency.(although it did cover it) This book confirmed my history professor's statement that we need more men like John Quincy Adams fighting for principle on our behalf today. It left me with a lot to think about and a desire to reexamine whether I am basing my own actions on principle. I highly recommend this book.

Nathan says

If John Quincy Adam's Presidency was marked by the less-than-engrossing minutiae of internal improvements and infrastructure development, his post-presidential career makes up for it. The first 3 quarters of Wheelan's book are unfortunately entangled in the rather mundane and confusing details of a man navigating a new and complicated life in politicking. It's difficult and tedious work keeping up with this section of the narrative; there is little clarity or humanity given to the characters involved, not least Adams himself. His pugnacity seems

mere ill-will; the weighty issues at hand seem arcane and irrelevant. The lighter side of Adams's personal life is rather more deftly handled, as we catch a glimpse of his deep and enduring interests in science and literature, in poetry and moral philosophy.

Then, abruptly: slavery. The issue explodes on the scene, propelling both Adam's and the pace of the book into high gear. Formerly an accommodationist, Adams is transformed, seemingly overnight, into a fiery abolitionist warrior. His Congressional campaign, tireless yet dogged by a repressive congress and the mounting effects of old age, is a thrilling story. The last section of this narrative is almost a new book- far outstripping the first in energy, importance and readability.

Wheelan could have used an editor, but his story, when he finally gets around to it, is well worth telling.

Pete Iseppi says

John Quincy Adams was an amazing man. Considered by most to be a failure as our sixth President (and son of our second President) he refused to withdraw from the service of his country, and served as a congress man for 17 years after his presidency. He is the only ex-president to serve in Congress. And serve he did. An ardent abolitionist, Adams was a thorn (a very sharp thorn) in the side of the southern states, constantly badgering about the "peculiar institution", slavery.

For over eight years, Adams battled in Congress to overturn the "gag rule" the the Southern Congressmen had passed, so that issues regarding the abolition of slavery could not be brought to the floor and debated. Adams was also the Chairman of the committee that received and allocated the funds willed to the United States by James Smithson. These funds were the seed money that launched the Smithsonian Institution. John Quincy Adams served his country for 50 years.

A tablet in the church where Adams is buried, contains two lines (of the several inscribed) that accurately summarize his life:

"A son, worthy of his Father
A Citizen shedding glory on his Country"

Lee says

An excellent short book focusing on the 6th Presidents 8 terms in the House of Representatives following his defeat by Andrew Jackson. The book only briefly describes Adam's diplomatic career, his tenure as Secretary of State for James Monroe and his one term as President. It focuses on his tenure in the House and his fight against Southern Senators over the right of Petition, Southern Rep's wanted to gag the House from bringing up petitions to abolish slavery. It also highlights his fight against the annexation of Texas because he did not wish it to enter the US as a slave state. It tells how he helped argue before the Supreme Court for the freedom of the Amistad's slaves. It highlights how a very unpopular President became hugely popular post presidency, especially in the North and earned the respect of his foes. Excellent Read

Iowa City Public Library says

John Quincy Adams was destined to be president. The son of a founding father /president, an experience diplomat, a successful Secretary of State, and a man full of ambitious ideas for America, Adams was extremely qualified for the job. Unfortunately, his presidency is viewed as an utter failure, the victim of

partisan politics (as well as the fact that he didn't win either the popular or electoral vote...but no one did in the 1824 election).

However, he was able to make it all up during his post-presidency, which is the focus of Joseph Wheeler's Mr. Adams's Last Crusade. It's an interesting read that covers Adams's seventeen-year term in the US House of Representatives and his fight against censorship and the expansion of slavery into US territories. A vocal critic of the Jackson and Van Buren presidencies, Adams sought to protect the Constitution from expanding presidential power. On top of his moral crusades, he also argued the Amistad case in front of the US Supreme Court, as well as had a large hand in creating the Smithsonian Institution. If you enjoy biographies, politics, and/or American history, I highly recommend Mr. Adams's Last Crusade. --Anne

From ICPL Staff Picks Blog

Omar says

This was an excellent biography of the post-presidency life of JQA. I recently finished Paul Nagle's John Quincy Adams: A Public Life, a Private Life. Wheelan's book is an excellent second volume to read on the life of JQA. I say second only because Wheelan speeds by Adams' life in three chapters to get to his post-presidential career. (Those three chapters were an excellent summary!)

I appreciated his approach to JQA, especially his development of Adams' Christian faith and Abolitionist convictions. Some chapters are more thematic in their approach as opposed to chronological, such as Adams' scientific interests. (The only problem this provided is that we jump ahead towards the end of JQA life and then jump back at the start of the next chapter.)

Anyone wanting to learn more about our sixth president would enjoy this book.

Brad says

Most histories of JQA focus on his outstanding early service to the country, including his time as our most qualified Secretary of State, then finish with his lackluster presidency. His extensive post-presidential career in Congress-one that spanned 17 years after his tenure in the White House-is generally glossed over. This book attempts to remedy that. He was a brilliant man, passionate and articulate. Like his father, he was an ardent patriot who eschewed parties and devoted his life to democracy. And, like his father, he has not been shown much respect, historically. By focusing on his crusade in Congress-one that sought to destroy slavery and to uphold the right to petition, JQA is given his due credit as one of our most influential leaders, the last of the Revolutionary generation.

Martin says

(Preliminary review:)

A quick, excellent read about JQA's congressional years, a perfect companion piece to Harlow Giles Unger's biography of John Quincy Adams.

Chris says

John Quincy Adams “had demonstrated a rare willingness for someone of his years to challenge his own assumptions and fixed opinions about slavery and then to make a last, great ideological leap to an abolition position. It had been a long journey spanning decades—one that began in obliviousness and then progressed to a dawning awareness of the implications of the 1820 Missouri Compromise; thence to a moral revulsion tempered by fears that pushing too hard for abolition might shatter the Union; and finally, to a conviction that civil war was inevitable, with the alternative being a surrender of constitutional liberties to the South... [I]t was Adams who took risks by choosing to steer by his moral principles.”

That excerpt captures the essences of Joseph Wheelan’s fine historical biography of John Quincy Adams’s post-presidential career as a member of the House of Representatives. A failed president who, drafted into Congress by constituents in his district, Adams evolved to become the leading antebellum anti-slavery advocate in the federal government. Adams waged a courageous, multi-decade crusade against slavery, the end of which he predicted—even to the point of envisaging a future U.S. President’s use of constitutional war powers to emancipate slaves—but, sadly, didn’t live long enough to witness the War that heralded its passing.

There are other nuggets contained in this short volume—for example, Adams’s crucial role in ensuring the establishment of the Smithsonian Institution—but its focus remains on Adams’s antislavery work, ranging from his forceful representation of the Amistad mutineers before the Supreme Court to his successful campaign to end the “Gag rule” that suppressed the First Amendment right to petition Congress against slavery.

This book is an informative and easy read. In the end, I can’t help but think that John Quincy Adams’s father, President John Adams, would have been proud.

Louis Verile Jr. says

One of the funniest books I’ve read. JQA at his best on the House Floor wailing away at the bigots from the South. His sarcasm, wit and brains were too much for slavery lovers to handle. Worth every second I spent reading.
