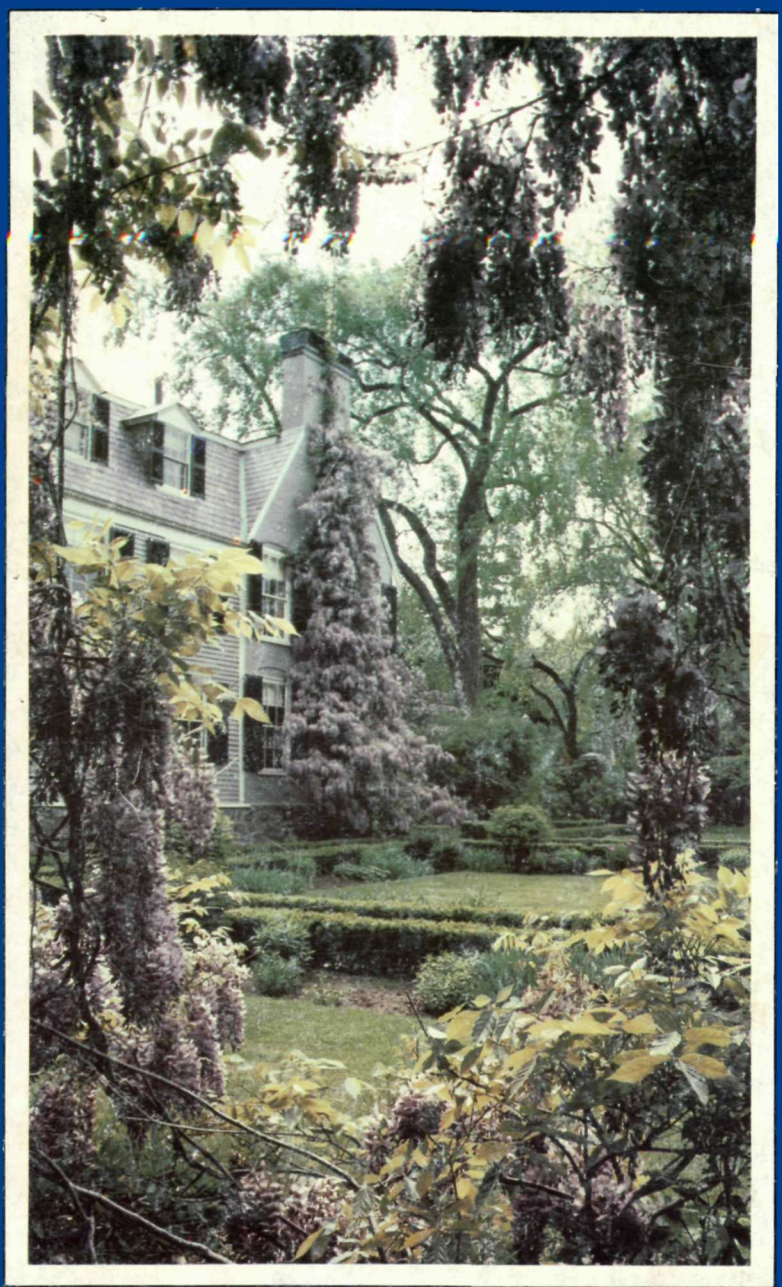
Adams
National Historic Site



A Family's Legacy to America

Adams
National Historic Site

A Family's Legacy to America

Frontispiece. The Old House in 1976.

Adams
National Historic Site

A Family's Legacy to America

Wilhelmina S. Harris

Superintendent,
Adams National Historic Site
Quincy, Massachusetts

U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Washington, D.C.
1983

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Harris, Wilhelmina.
The Adams National Historic Site.

Supt. of Docs. no.: I 29.2:Ad1
1. Adams National Historic Site (Quincy, Mass.)
2. Adams family. 3. Adams, Brooks, 1848--1927.
3. Quincy (Mass.)—Buildings. I. Title.
F74.Q7H24 974.4'7 81-607168
AACR2

Cover Photograph:
The west side of the Old House showing the wisteria.

Contents

Foreword
vii

Acknowledgments
xi

The Adamses and the Old House
1

The Old House Porcelain—
A Cause for Special Inspiration
17

The Eighteenth-Century Garden
47

Foreword

It was a rare, good fortune for the people of the United States when Wilhelmina Sellers came to the Old House in Quincy to act as Brooks Adams' private secretary and to assist in the management of his household. Mrs. Adams' health was failing, her memory was faulty, and the elaborate machinery of late nineteenth-century life, town houses, country homes, servants, horses and the new and fearful invention of the motor car were an invitation to chaos. Miss Sellers took quiet charge of the arrangements, leaving Brooks the happy illusion that he was running everything.

There is no doubt that Brooks' remaining years were made happier, very much happier, by the presence in his household of such a capable person. The details of organization appall a modern mind. The twice yearly trip to and from Quincy to Boston, a distance of a dozen miles, required the effort of Napoleon preparing to invade Russia. Fresh eggs and milk, home-grown strawberries, and flowers were the expected comforts of life. So were perfect service at table, polished woodwork, good cooking, well-raked garden paths. This meant cooks, housemaids, gardeners, coachmen, and that most dangerous of metamorphoses—a coachman turned chauffeur. All this Miss Sellers managed.

But unless some Proust can recapture such a past, it has little interest to modern Americans. What does have interest is the history of the Old House itself, the development of the minds that made it famous and the influence of its spaces and its artifacts on those minds, and the study of these objects as reflections of the tastes of their possessors. Brooks Adams spent a great deal of thought along these lines. What he thought and what he

remembered would be lost were it not for the fortunate chance that brought Miss Sellers to the Old House. With an intelligence as sharp and retentive as James Boswell, she registered in memory the character, the quirks, and the wisdom of the last family member to inhabit the place. Through her, we are linked to a living past.

After Brooks Adams died, Miss Sellers became the wife of Colonel Frank Harris and the mother of three sons. For twenty years, the old place did not know her. It struggled along, falling more and more into disrepair as the depression bit into the finances of the Adams Memorial Society. Then came the second war, with its shortages of everything old houses need, such as caretakers, carpenters, and the materials of building. A solution was found in 1946 when the Nation accepted the responsibility for maintaining the Old House as a National Historic Site.

But it would have been a barren solution without Mrs. Harris. She returned to take charge of the site for the Government. She insisted on working closely with the family. To the preservation of the traditions of the place, she brought a knowledge and integrity absolutely unique. Under her care, nothing has been changed except as meticulous maintenance can put new life in old wood, polishing can make crystal sparkle, and leather dressing can supple old books. The arrangement of furniture in its most accustomed place as remembered by the family has been respected. Only authentic objects, as returned from time to time by the family, have been added. As nearly as possible, the house and its furnishings, the library, the garden and the grounds today live, as they lived and grew during the tenure of four generations of Adamses.

What was shabby and worn has been left shabby and worn. The books were read and continue to look like books that are read. The brasses on the furniture are left dull where it was the habit of the family to leave them dull. Where, as in the fireplace, they were kept bright, they are kept bright. The china in the cupboards is spotless. The linen is laid away with utmost care.

The family cared very little for show. It cared a great deal for what was useful and being itself of use to the Nation. That is what the house is saying still. Mrs. Harris has seen to it that no false restoration changes its tone. What she writes about the house and about Brooks Adams is a safe guide for later generations. A great nephew who retains a vivid memory of Uncle Brooks making tea—just a drop of tea in hot water, then pouring

out half and adding more hot water, endlessly repeated—recognizes the truth of her words.

Thomas Boylston Adams

Acknowledgments

Thanks to the National Geographic for the picture of the eighteenth-century Garden which appears on the front cover.

I owe very special thanks to Patricia E. Shaheen of the Interpretive Staff at Adams National Historic Site for her help in assembling the illustrations and in raising my wilting spirits from time to time.

To the North Atlantic Region of the National Park Service, my gratitude for such a pleasant and heartwarming assignment.

My thanks to Marc Friedlaender of the Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, editor of six volumes of Charles Francis Adams, for his help and inspiration in the initial work on the porcelain section of this booklet.

My thanks to the Eastern National Park and Monument Association for making possible the photographs in color for this booklet.

My thanks go to George Dow, photographer, for his skill and enthusiasm to produce the photographs in color and the larger part of those in black and white. His desire to be helpful and his skill in his profession made working with him a great pleasure.

And a debt of gratitude is also extended to Paul C. Nagel, historian and Director of the Virginia Historical Society, for his encouragement and suggestions during the writing of the entire booklet.

Wilhelmina S. Harris

The Adamses and the Old House

For four generations and for almost a century and a half, the Adams homestead in Quincy, Massachusetts, known as the Old House, was residence for one of America's most distinguished families. Presidents of the United States, diplomats, legislators, literary figures, and economic leaders all lived there as part of a clan extending from John and Abigail Adams, the first occupants, to Brooks and Evelyn Adams, the last family members to use the Old House as a private residence. In 1946, the Adams Memorial Society presented the Old House with the family furnishings to the people of the United States "...with the purpose of fostering civic virtue and patriotism." This magnificent gift included family furnishings with a large and interesting collection of porcelain and china from Holland, Denmark, Germany, France, Switzerland, England, Japan, China, and the United States. It reflects the taste of each of the Adamses who selected various furnishings for use during their official diplomatic residences abroad.

All of the Adamses were undoubtedly mindful of the historic association of the decorative china and of the importance of its preservation; but Brooks Adams was, it appears, the first to make a scholarly study of paintings, rugs, and Chinese export porcelain. This study continued throughout his life. His interest in the English, French, and German porcelain had been sparked when he served, during the arbitration of the *Alabama Claims* in 1872, as secretary to his father, Charles Francis Adams, in Geneva, Switzerland. His interest in the Chinese export and Japanese porcelain began with his study of the trade routes, his travels in India, and a proposed trip to China about the turn of the century. Thus, he was the perfect teacher to instruct a newcomer about his

family's venerable residence and its contents that were prized for so many years.

It was in the early spring of 1920 that I was introduced to the Adams family country estate. When we approached the door, stepping up on the reddish sandstone entrance, Mr. Adams called my attention to the lack of the keyhole in the front door. This, he surmised, was due to the fact that the Old House was built for a wealthy West Indies plantation owner. The household servants were always in the house to open the door for the master, thus eliminating the need for door keys. Looking down at the entrance, Mr. Adams said that Presidents of the United States, ecclesiastical as well as secular scholars, presidents of Harvard, political leaders, neighbors, and personal friends had crossed this threshold since 1788 to be greeted by four generations of Adams ladies.

As we entered the Panelled Room, Mr. Brooks Adams remarked that he felt proud but humbled as he recalled the members of his family now gone. With his characteristic ability for quick recovery from depression, he would add that the Adams family and the Nation were the richer for the lives of these famous forebears. Very soon, the parlor maid, dressed in a fresh uniform and organdy cap and apron, brought in the tea tray placing it in front of Mrs. Adams who sat on the small sofa. The description by Henry Adams, in his autobiography entitled, *Education of Henry Adams,* of his grandmother, the wife of John Quincy Adams, serving tea to the "Old President" was being repeated except that the English porcelain tea service was used by Mrs. Brooks Adams rather than the Sèvre Set that had been used by Louisa Catherine Adams. As Mr. Adams drank his hot water in lieu of tea, his thoughts went back to the building of the Old House. The fine walls of mahogany, grown on the plantation belonging to Leonard Vassall, looked fresh and alive. They had been unique, he thought, for a small six-room "country retreat" (fig. 1).

With his usual delight to be in his beloved childhood home once again, Mr. Adams spoke admiringly of the freshly polished brass fireplace appurtenances, and the simple but beautiful fireplace wire fender. The blazing wood fire added beauty to the brass andirons and brought an extra glow to both the mahogany walls and the antique Kazak rugs.

On that visit to the Old House, I found that every generation of Adamses had left furnishings in the house. Although most of the contents had been left by John and Abigail

Figure 1. The beauty of the mahogany panelling brings letters of inquiry as to its preservation from as far away as Santo Domingo.

Adams, Mr. Brooks Adams pointed with special pride to the writing desk by the window facing the 18th-century garden. He had given this American-made desk to his mother about 1876. He explained that this centennial piece was an example of how well American craftsmanship had developed.

Mr. Adams was especially interested to recall the distinguished visitors who had been entertained in this handsome room. Because Abigail Adams and President John Adams had used it as a combination sitting-dining room, many historic

events had occurred here. In 1817, President James Monroe, accompanied by the Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and other important dignitaries, came to dine with John and Abigail Adams, the parents of Monroe's newly appointed Secretary of State. At that moment, John Quincy Adams was on the high seas returning home from his post as Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of Saint James's.

Their son's appointment must have been especially gratifying to Abigail who had literally trained her son from the cradle to be prepared for future national responsibility. To use her own words, she said he would some day be the "guardian of his countries (sic) laws and liberties." Other references to Abigail's plan for her son's future can be found in her letter to him written on January 12, 1780, shortly after he, his brother, Charles, and his father had sailed for Europe:

These are the times in which a genius would wish to live. It is not in the still calm of life, or the repose of a pacific station, that great characters are formed . . . Great necessities call out great virtues. When a mind is raised and animated by scenes that engage the heart, then those qualities, which would otherwise lie dormant, wake into life and form the character of the hero and the statesman.

There is a wealth of information of Abigail Adams' wise provisions for the comfort of her family, but her letters tell us little concerning her personal attire and appearance in Quincy. For that information, we are fortunate to have the following description. After the death of Abigail Adams on October 28, 1818, William Bentley, D.D., Pastor of the East Church in Salem wrote:

We have notice of the death of Abigail, wife of the late President John Adams who is still living at his home in Quincy... The first time I ever saw Madam was at her own house shelling her beans for a family dinner to which without any ceremony or apology she invited me... She was in appearance of middle size, in the dress of matrons who were in New England in my youth. The black bonnet, the short cloak, the gown open before, and quilted petticoat and the high heeled shoe, as worn universally in that day...

On Sunday, August 29, 1824, one of the most moving scenes which took place in the Panelled Room was the reunion of John Adams and his old friend General LaFayette. This was the

first opportunity John Adams had to visit with his comrade since his return to America in 1788. The guests for dinner, about 20, included General LaFayette's son, George Washington La-Fayette, Josiah Quincy, the President of Harvard, his daughter Eliza Susan Quincy, Governor Eustis, and Mr. Whitney from Cohasset. Among the family members present was young Charles Francis Adams, a student at Harvard.

How the guests were seated for dinner on this occasion, Mr. Brooks Adams did not know, only that his father was not pleased with his seat which was practically in the east doorway. In spite of his displeasure with the seating arrangement, Charles Francis Adams did recall in his diary the excitement of the day as follows:

How many people in this country would have been delighted with my situation at this moment, to see three distinguished men dining at the same table, with the reflections all brought up concerning the old days of the revolution, in which they were conspicuous actors and for their exertions in which, the country is grateful.

As interesting as the memory of social events was, Mr. Brooks Adams was most moved by the simple country-style Chippendale sofa with its old red velvet cover, because it was here where John Adams sat for the master artist, Gilbert Stuart, to paint his portrait. This painting was done at the request of President John Quincy Adams who wished to remember his father on this sofa with his hand resting upon his walking stick.

On September 11, 1823, President John Quincy Adams made this entry in his diary:

My father has been sitting to Stuart, the painter, and he told me that he would make a picture of it that should be admired as long as the materials would hold together.

John Adams wrote of his time spent with Gilbert Stuart saying:

I should like to sit for Stuart from the first of January to the last of December, for he lets me do just as I please and keeps me constantly amused by his conversation.

There are also other associations of President John Quincy Adams and his lady, Louisa Catherine Adams, in this handsome room which Mr. Brooks Adams enjoyed recalling. The

two empire folding tables which stand against the wall were acquired by Louisa Catherine Adams in Baltimore. The workmanship of the pair of tables is superb and represents the delicate, beautiful first lady, Louisa Catherine Adams, in this predominantly Abigail Adams room.

It was also in this Panelled Room and the room across the hall in which 20 ladies and 16 gentlemen gathered on the 17th of July, 1847, to celebrate the eightieth birthday of John Quincy Adams. Mr. Quincy gave a toast in honor of the occasion saying:

The old man eloquent, may his latter years be as happy, and tranquil, as the whole course of his past life, has been useful and glorius [sic].

John Quincy Adams responded:

Ladies and Gentlemen: I thank you all for your good wishes, which I reciprocate, by hoping you will all live to be eighty years of age, and then be surrounded by friends as near and dear to you, as those I see around me.

It was the height of the ceiling of the small entry off the mahogany room that Abigail Adams mentioned in her letter to her daughter, Abigail Adams Smith, in 1788:

I hope soon to embrace you, my dear children, in Braintree; but be sure you wear no feathers, and let Colonel Smith come without heels to his shoes or he will not be able to walk upright.

The great unanswered query is why such a descriminating lady as Abigail overlooked the fine oak stairway. The handsomely carved skirtboard and the finely proportioned and carved balustrades have been appraised by architects as unusual for a small country house of 1731.

On the east side of the entry is the door which led into Abigail Adams' formal parlor. A description of this room in the early 1800's is in an account of the visit of Anne Royall, a journalist from Alabama. Miss Royall traveled to Quincy by the stage which stopped in front of the Old House for her visit with the second President of the United States, John Adams. After a private conversation with him, Miss Royall was invited to have tea with the ladies in the parlor. She noted the light green walls, the pearl gray woodwork, the portraits of President Washington

and his lady, and she described the furniture as delicately upholstered, like a "fine lady's" dress.

This room also served as a parlor for President and Mrs. John Quincy Adams. After Mrs. John Quincy Adams' death in 1852, her son, Charles Francis Adams, had the architect, John Cabot, make the alterations to change this room into a dining room. Dark brown floral paper adorned the walls; dark brown trim and modern louvered shutters were installed. The terra cotta fireplace replaced the delicate Biblical tiles.

Mrs. Charles Francis Adams took great interest in the life in Quincy, especially in the church. In her letter to her son, Henry, she described an event for the church which took place in the dining room.

...Three weeks ago, it was proposed as our Sewing Circle was rather poor, to try to raise a trifle, say 20 or 25 dollars, to keep us along. After talking it over the plan was this. Each member of the Society, say forty persons, should contribute something, either fancy articles, or Cake, and ask our friends to come in the evening and buy our things. The weather had been like July, so that every flower was standing when this took place on Wednesday the 20th a week tomorrow. Caroline Beale and Lucretia dressed the rooms with flowers, and no N. york bridal was ever more beautiful, and the heat and summer... at two the members of the Society began to come with their offerings. Some one article, some big, some lively, some trifles, but the quantity.... At six o'clock I had tea for fifty persons. The table was laid in the dining room and they all stood. I had every variety of cake ever heard of, sponge, pound, plum, mixed, frosted, unfrosted, gingerbread and cream cakes... with tea and coffee. I am bound to think they liked it, by the way they ate and drank..., and I enjoyed it highly. As soon as tea was over and the table cleared the ladies filled the long table with their cake fruit and flowers for sale, and a sight to behold it was, crammed full. It had been agreed among themselves that two young ladies should stand at the door and take fifteen cents from every one who entered. At seven people began to come, and bless your heart, there were three hundred and fifty here. Everything worth selling was gone at once, and they could have sold twice as much. The old house never was so full before, and as orderly as a private party.

Since Mr. Brooks Adams remembered his mother as completely devoted to her family, he noted that on two Sundays each month she invited the Minister of Quincy's Stone Church to accompany the family home for the meal of the day. Mrs. Adams made a point of seeing that her youngest son, Brooks, and her

daughter, Mary, along with any other members of the family then at home were to be present. Brooks Adams remembered those dinners as times when he heard interesting topics explored.

For the approaching golden wedding anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Francis Adams in 1879, preparations were made for a reception in the Long Room. Although this reception went off as planned, Mr. Brooks Adams enjoyed recalling the more intimate family gathering which occurred in the Dining Room at breakfast for his parents. Charles Francis Adams recorded the occasion in his diary as follows:

Wednesday 3d. At last the great Anniversary arrived... I set to work early in order to complete what I proposed to read as a reiminiscence of the three occasions of family jubilees. But it was put out of my head by the continuous exposition at breakfast of the memorial gifts respectfully presented to my Wife and myself, as well by friends as by relations. Of the family there were my sons, John, and Charles with their Wives, and Brooks—and Mary with her husband. Then came Isaac Hull Adams and his sister Elizabeth—two of John's boys George and Charles and Charles's daughter. Mr. Kuhn who had come across the seas at this time to be here.

In looking out the three south windows in the Dining Room as they open upon the Front Piazza, Mr. Brooks Adams would recall several interesting historical events which had taken place there. On August 14, 1821, President John Adams, in his 86th year, received more than 200 West Point Cadets. These young men had marched from West Point to Boston. Being so near, they marched to Quincy to call upon their one time Commander-in-Chief, John Adams. The family of the old president had tried to discourage him from making a speech, thinking he was too infirm to appear in a formal role.

The fine young men in their perfectly fitted uniforms presented such an impressive picture that John Adams' voice rang out like the John Adams of old. Louisa Catherine Adams helped in the preparations for the event and recorded the following description:

We were all up at six and the Tables were spread with refreshments. Three tables were spread in the Paddock between the Stables and the House with Hams, Tongues, Beef, Cheese, bread, crackers, Coffee, Chocolate, Limonade, Punch and wine. In the Long Room there were tables for the officers and company—An awning was spread over the

heads of the Cadets and multitude were scattered in every direction forming the most picturesque view you can imagine.

The corps marched up very handsomely and formed in lines within the yard—when my father had received them with the usual compliments the staff mounted on the Piazza and silence was ordered when he addressed them in a very good speech which he had written the day previous. He spoke in a manner which astonished and gratified all who heard. He was considerably agitated at the commencement but his voice became stronger every moment and he was distinctly heard by the greater part of the company. The exertion was too great for him to make and I confess I was under the greatest apprehension lest he should be overcome by the effort.

In the summer of 1824 after the private dinner for General LaFayette was held in the Panelled Room, the gentlemen of Quincy, whom John Adams had invited to meet the general, were greeted by both the former president and his distinguished guest on the Front Piazza. Each invited guest had the opportunity to shake hands with the French patriot and his host. Then, the scene shifted to the Long Room where John Adams presented his old friend to the ladies of Quincy. Though history does not record General Lafayette's reaction, it must have been that of national pride and personal satisfaction to see the reception taking place in a room furnished almost completely with French furniture. The Louis XV chairs and sofa were not new to the general as John Adams had used them during his missions abroad. Everywhere the general looked, he could see reminders of his beloved France (fig. 2)—for example, the magnificent Vincennes wine cooler which predated the Sèvre factory, or the two French gueridons with their fine inlay, and each showing the superb artistry of the French craftsman.

Figure 2. Brooks Adams' favorite memory of the Long Room was his sister Louisa testing her accuracy in kicking off her slippers in the south end of the room and having them land under the table against the mirror in the north end of the room. ►

Brooks Adams would also remember that the Long Room had been the scene of many other important events in the lives of the Adams family, including christenings of their children, weddings of both family and household servants, and several funerals. It was in this spacious room that the body of John Quincy Adams was brought for a brief moment before the public funeral in the Stone Church. This gave his beloved family privacy as they said farewell to "old man eloquent."

In speaking of the Old House, Mr. Brooks Adams and other members of the family frequently referred to the "simple life." Perhaps most of the time, it was simple, but an exception was the wedding on June 20, 1877, of Mary Adams, the daughter of Ambassador and Mrs. Charles Francis Adams. A relative recorded the following description of this occasion:

> . . . The wedding was private, but everything in exquisite taste; . . . it was something to look forward to, a wedding in the dear old house. There were no guests, but those especially interested; the Quincy families, the Brooks, and all the Adams. Mrs. Adams received us, in the long Drawing room, and Mary was married, where the Damask Sofa, used to stand, under the Portraits, of our Grand father, and Grand Mother; and Uncle Adams Portrait by Copley, was in the middle.
>
> Mary looked very lovely; so refined, elegant, and dignified; her Father gave her away; and young Charles's Daughter, Mary, stood by her, and John Quincy's son Charley, on the other side, with Brooks . . . The flowers, and plants, were Superb; the rooms were filled with them and looked like the tropics. Smilax, Passion flowers, Roses and Lillies. Pots arranged on the Marble Pier Tables, filled with Exotics, and reaching to the top of the Mirror, with vines, and Grasses, looked lovely.

During the summer of 1858, the Long Room was used as a meeting place for the Stone Church choir rehearsals. Charles Francis Adams was extremely interested to improve the quality of the singing and took an active role in the promotion of music.

At the east end of the second floor, above this beautifully proportioned, spacious Drawing Room, was a room of equal size of which Mr. Adams was especially fond. It had been designated by Abigail Adams to be a study-library for her husband who was then President. When visiting Mr. Brooks Adams, the distinguished Bostonian, Mark Anthony DeWolfe Howe called this room, "the room of thought." He surmised that there had been more hard thinking in this room than any other in our country.

Figure 3. Mr. Adams would recall with great emotion the work of his great-grandfather while sitting at the elaborately inlaid escritoire and awaiting the final signing of the Treaty of Peace, thus creating the new nation.

This was, perhaps, due to the fact that, in this room, four generations of Adams scholars studied government, literature, history, and carried on their voluminous correspondence (fig. 3).

The most notable of this correspondence recalled by Mr. Brooks Adams was that of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. These two close friends and comrades passed a great deal of time together while abroad during the early years of America's struggle for independence. However, differences in political views and misunderstandings silenced their communication from about 1801 to the latter part of 1811.

In 1811, Edward Coles, Secretary to President Madison, along with his brother John, a neighbor to President Jefferson, made a trip through the Northeast, visiting the most interesting places and carrying letters of introduction to prominent citizens. In their itinerary, of course, was included a visit to President and Mrs. John Adams. Much of their formal discussions took place in the beautiful, large Study of the former President. Edward Coles, the friend and neighbor of Thomas Jefferson brought happy and encouraging news from him concerning his feelings toward Mr. Adams. In return, President Adams sent a kindly message to President Jefferson saying: "I always loved Jefferson, and still do."

Thomas Jefferson had often promised that one day he would resume correspondence with his old comrade. Repeatedly, he mentioned that he had no ill feelings toward Mr. Adams; and when the Coles brothers brought their greeting from the occupant of the Old House, President Jefferson again expressed the same sentiment. In the meantime, John Adams took a very urbane course of action by writing on January 1, 1812, to his colleague, sending him two volumes written by John Quincy Adams entitled, "Lectures on Oratory." John Adams, in his letter, entitled the volumes "homespun." Mr. Adams' letter preceded the arrival of the package at Monticello. Mr. Jefferson, misinterpreting that the forthcoming package would contain a sample of cloth, answered Mr. Adams' letter immediately with this reply:

Dear Sir

I thank you before hand (for they are not yet arrived) for the specimens of homespun you have been so kind as to forward me by post. I doubt not their excellence, knowing how far you are advanced in these things in your quarter. Here we do little in the fine way, but in coarse and midling goods a great deal. Every family in the country is a manafactory within itself, and is very generally able to make within itself all the stouter and midling stuffs for it's own clothing and household use. We consider a sheep for every person in the family as sufficient to clothe it, in addition to the cotton, hemp and flax which we raise ourselves. For fine stuff we shall depend on your Northern manufactures...

A letter from you calls up recollections very dear to my mind. It carries me back to the times when, beset with difficulties and dangers, we were fellow laborers in the same cause, struggling for what is most valuable to man, his right of self-government. Laboring always at the same oar, with some wave ever ahead threatening to overhwelm us and yet passing

harmless under our bark, we knew not how, we rode through the storm with heart and hand, and made a happy port...

No circumstances have lessened the interest I feel in these particulars respecting yourself; none have suspended for one moment my sincere esteem for you; and I now salute you with unchanged affections and respect.

These letters broke the ice, and from 1812 to 1826, one of the most illuminating correspondences took place from the Study of the Old House.

The last and most important event in the Study, the memory of which always deeply stirred Brooks Adams, was when John Adams, sitting in his wing chair in the southeast corner of the room received a delegation from Quincy. They were requesting a Fourth of July message which would be read to the citizens on Independence Day, 1826. The Old President wrote, "Independence Forever." When asked if he had something else to add, he replied, "Not a word." It was in the chair in the southeast corner of the Study where John Adams, the statesman; the patriot; the diplomat; the loving husband, father and grandfather breathed his last on July 4, 1826. Unknown to John Adams, his friend Thomas Jefferson had died before him just a few hours earlier on the same day.

The Old House Porcelain— A Cause of Special Inspiration

Mr. and Mrs. Brooks Adams regularly passed their summers in Quincy. Here, Mr. Adams did a large part of his writing. When at the Old House, Mr. Adams was accustomed to make all decisions of housekeeping, even to the last detail. Mrs. Adams explained to me that in their Boston house, she carried all responsibility, but in Quincy, it was different. "This house represents Brooks' family heritage, so we must do everything as he remembers his mother did!"

It was my good fortune during the summers from 1920 to 1926 to see the china at the Old House used by Mr. and Mrs. Brooks Adams. The spring and fall of 1920 were perhaps the most pleasant parts of that period for all of us, since Mrs. Adams' health was for a time improved. That summer, her quick wit softened the serious approach her husband brought to any discussion of the family's furnishings.

Because of Mr. Adams' abiding interest in the Old House and of his knowledge of the historic and aesthetic significance of its furnishings, he wanted to insure permanent protection of the Old House and its contents. To this end, Mr. Adams made appointments during 1920 to interview several museum experts for their opinion as to the feasibility of opening the Old House as a historic memorial to his forebears. This plan would require the approval of his family as well as the creation of a trust fund, which he had under consideration. It also renewed his determination to understand fully the story of the treasures contained in the Old House. He knew that satisfying his historical bent provided enjoyment for Mrs. Adams. He resolved that summer to undertake anew the study of the Old House china. For him, many of the pieces carried associations, learned from his parents, of

historically significant events. However, it is important to note that a full appreciation of the china as well as of much of the furniture in the Old House must be grounded on the knowledge gained through the numerous winters Brooks Adams and his wife had passed in Europe, and more particularly in the Middle and Far East. Such travels added considerably to what others as well as myself eventually learned, especially about the Old House porcelain.

Soon after their marriage on September 7, 1889, Mr. and Mrs. Adams made an extensive trip that began in France. There they visited Sainte-Chapelle, Notre Dame, and Chartres, monuments which Mr. Adams already knew well but wished to enjoy once again with his bride. From Europe, they journeyed on to Palestine to visit Baalbek and Krak des Chevaliers, special architectural gems in his view, and finally up the Nile as far as Khartoum. Some years later, when the preparation of his book, *The Law of Civilization and Decay,* had exhausted Brooks Adams, he decided that they should go to India. In after years, Mrs. Adams would comment that the real purpose of the trip was to gather material for another book! Mr. Adams' interest in studying the whole Eastern continent had been quickened by descriptions written by Marco Polo and especially Polo's accounts of the splendors of Baghdad. Often on Mr. Adams' lips

Figure 4. The Trans Siberian Railroad.

Figure 5. It was the custom of the fourth generation of the Adams family to rent a house in the various foreign cities where they traveled in order to get a better perspective of how the natives lived. Pictured are Mr. and Mrs. Brooks Adams with their servants in India.

was the old quotation, "The whole valley of Syr Daria was once so thickly settled that a nightingale could fly from branch to branch of the fruit trees, and a cat walk from wall to wall and housetop to housetop, from Kashgar to the Sea of Aral." An additional stimulus to the study of India had come to Mr. Adams through an interest in the development of its railroad system. This followed upon the absorption in accounts of the Siberian railroad being built across the 6,000 miles to Vladivostok (fig. 4) which was later to be included in his book, *The New Empire.* All of this, of course, better prepared Brooks Adams to understand the economy and products of the East.

At the first sight of India in 1896, Mrs. Adams was charmed. Mr. Adams admired his wife's adaptability to the various countries and recalled that whatever the customs or the language were, his wife could communicate with the natives and make their lives comfortable within a fortnight. In Bombay, they rented a house staffed with native personnel. A quarter of a century later, Mrs. Adams recalled to me in a most entertaining manner each of the Indian servants shown in the photograph (fig. 5) which she kept in her desk in the Panelled Room.

Being in India aroused a new interest in Brooks Adams. So thrilled was he with the art of this country that even his study of the railroads became secondary to his deepened concern for art. Formerly, oriental rugs, so full of eastern symbolism, as well as gothic architecture with its exquisite stained glass, had been his chief inspirations, emotionally as well as intellectually. However, the art of India now created a new dimension for study. From this experience, Mr. Adams broadened his whole interest in art, and soon he published two articles on art in America in the *American Architect.*

Exhibits in Calcutta and Bombay allowed the Adamses to see an abundance of Chinese porcelain specimens found in the archaeological digs in conjunction with the building of the railroads. The interesting designs on the porcelain fragments inspired Mr. Adams to want to go on to China. Among the specimens were pieces of funerary celadon jugs from the Sung Dynasty. When I later asked Mrs. Adams what her reaction was to the "small fragments" of chinese porcelain, she said that she enjoyed only unbroken porcelain such as she had in her Boston house and in the family home in Quincy. The plans to visit China and learn even more about ceramic art were thwarted by a sudden illness of Mr. Adams. After recuperating in Cairo, Mr. Adams felt equal to a visit to Constantinople (Istanbul). There, they were pleased with the exhibit of ancient celadons collected by the sultans, and Mrs. Adams thought these celadons the finest in the world.

These exquisite ancient celadons carried a legend which Mr. Adams never tired of repeating. He would relate with extraordinary amusement that the gray-green celadon plates were popular in India, Borneo, and the Arab countries because they were supposed to reveal any poison in the food placed upon them. Superstitions were so common in the near Eastern countries that it was comforting to the natives to believe that the celadon carried an assurance of safety. The mysterious formula for the contents of the ware and the intense hardness of the finished celadon product also added wonder and belief in this fascinating ancient legend.

In 1920, therefore, these memories of his India experience were rekindled and Mr. Brooks Adams turned again to his earlier study of the trade routes over which Chinese ceramic export had reached the West, particularly Holland and England, and eventually to the shelves and tables of the Old House in Quincy. Both Mr. and Mrs. Brooks Adams enjoyed looking at maps which

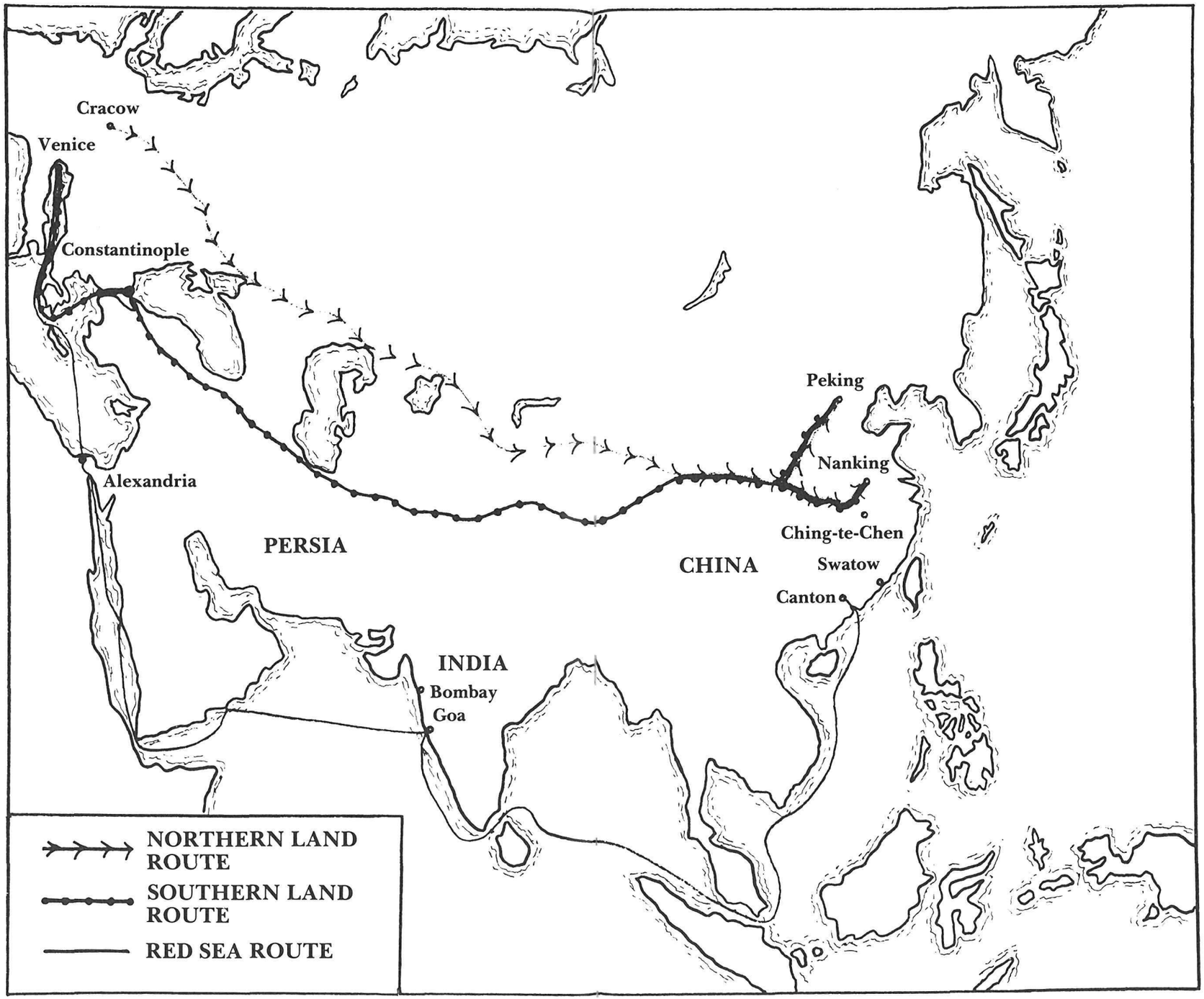
made the unexpected course in cultural history exciting entertainment. And, Mr. Adams never tired of explaining the conclusions of his research, especially with the maps and porcelain available as reference material. What follows are my recollections of Mr. Adams' own commentary during that summer of 1920.

In his view, there were four main routes by which the Old House china might have come. The spices, especially pepper, and beautiful silks from China, as well as the fascinating legends of this distant land, had enticed merchants to travel the hazardous land route from Western Europe via Poland, passing the northern tip of the Caspian Sea through Mongolia and on to Peking (fig. 6). Mr. Adams concluded that little porcelain was transported through the northern overland route because caravan travel was too rugged for such delicate cargo.

He theorized that in the 11th and 12th centuries, a southerly route would have been less demanding. He pointed out that such a route might have originated in Venice, then to Constantinople, extending overland across Anatolia (now Turkey), through Persia and across Afghanistan into China (fig. 6). It was shorter than the northern route, though travel was still by caravan. That there was porcelain carried over this land route could be verified, he thought, by the large variety of porcelain remaining in Turkey and Persia and by the significant amounts of broken porcelain dating back before the 11th century still being excavated in Egypt and Arabia.

A third trade route, according to Brooks Adams, wound its way entirely by sea from the Mediterranean ports of Venice and Constantinople to Alexandria, then via the Red Sea and the Bay of Bengal to Goa (fig. 6). Some of the traders went no farther than India, while others continued down the coast of India through the Straits of Malacca and finally to Canton, China. These traders brought back great quantities of ancient celadons and other fine pieces of porcelain decorated at Ching-te-chen as evidenced, Mr. Adams believed, by the beautiful chinaware still to be found along the North African coast as far west as Morocco and on the East African coast as far south as Zanzibar. Though the European ports on the Mediterranean Sea received porcelain, not much of it made its way to the markets of Central and Northern Europe. Their cargoes continued to be mostly spices and silks.

Figure 6. Northern, Southern, and Red Sea trade routes. ➤


Cracow
Venice
Constantinople
Alexandria
PERSIA
INDIA
Bombay
Goa
Peking
Nanking
Ching-te-Chen
CHINA
Swatow
Canton
NORTHERN LAND ROUTE
SOUTHERN LAND ROUTE
RED SEA ROUTE

His appraisal of these various ancient routes to India and the Far East by caravan and by sea convinced Mr. Adams that there was yet another trade route more directly connected to the Adams family porcelain. He said that in spite of the rather practical combination of land and sea paths extending from the Mediterranean to the Gulf of Macao, China, another significant route remained to be explored. The success of Columbus in 1492 inspired the Portuguese to undertake a sea trip to China. Their expedition in 1497 was led by Vasco da Gama who was instructed to make Portugal the trading center of Western Europe and, of course, incidentally to bring riches to his country. Mr. Adams traced da Gama's long voyage down the west coast of Africa around the Cape of Good Hope, into the Indian Ocean and through the Straits of Malacca to the port of Macao (fig. 7).

Since da Gama's ships were small, porcelain had to be only an incidental part of the cargo they brought back to Portugal. The amount of chinaware carried was usually determined by the number of crates necessary to "floor the ship." Since silks and spices would have suffered water damage if they had been stored on the floor of the small ships, it was convenient to use crates of large sets of the all-of-a-kind blue and white tableware as ballast. (All-of-a-kind meaning the same pattern or design on the sets of tableware.) Two-thirds of the floor of these small merchant ships was reserved for this rather inferior quality porcelain made especially for sale in foreign markets. One-third of the floor of the ship was reserved for the use of the officers. Unlike the inferior quality of the all-of-a-kind blue and white, the sets of porcelain bought by the officers were of better quality and were intended as presents to their families and friends.

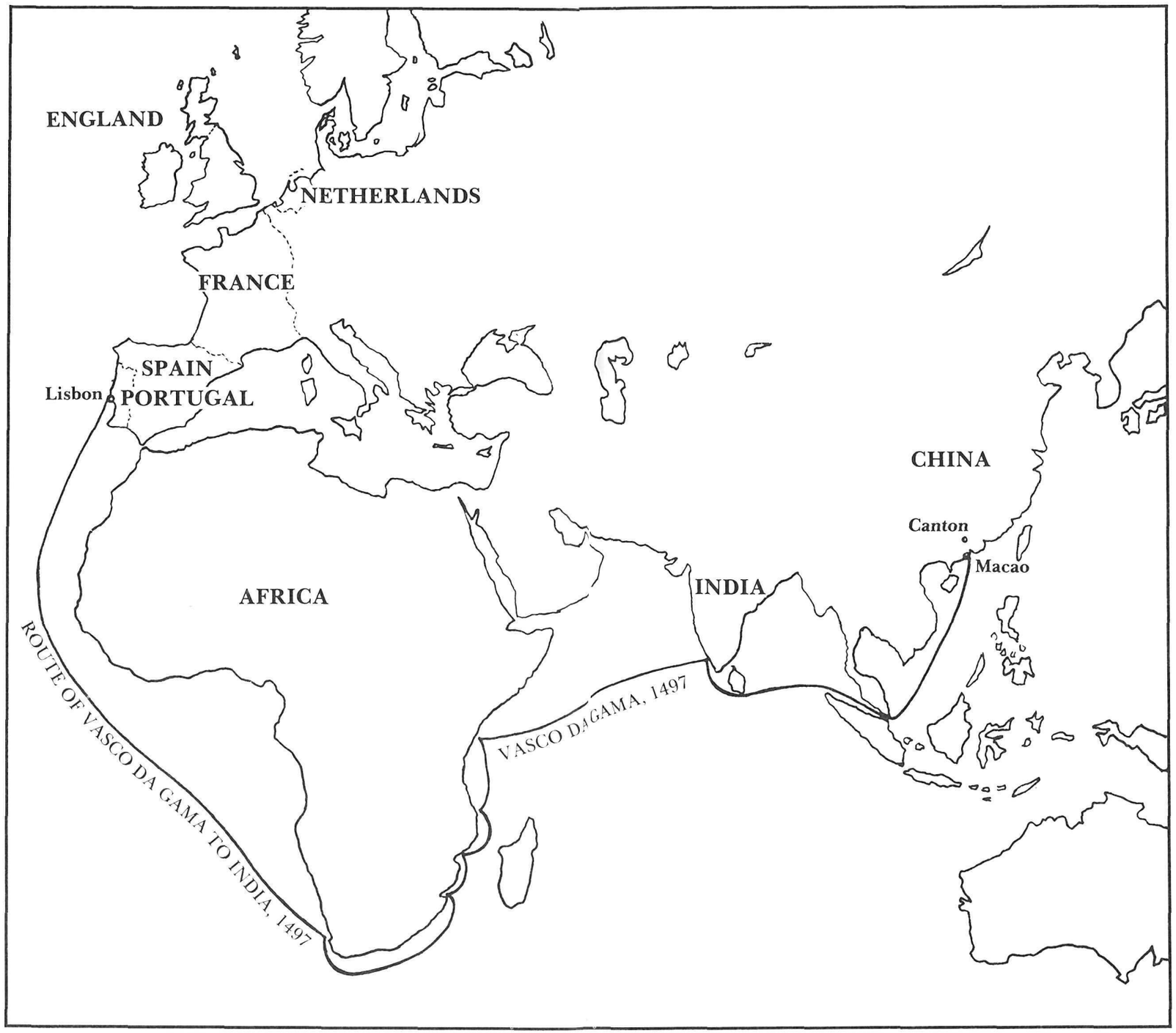
So pleasant was it in Quincy in 1920 that, despite his pleasure in going abroad, Mr. Adams regretted an earlier commitment to be in London the latter part of July. We sailed on July 10 and returned five weeks later. While in England, Mr. Adams did not abandon his review of Chinese Export chinaware, but rather increased his admiration of the Old House collection. When entertained in England in the homes of some old friends of Mr. and Mrs. Adams, we saw mantelpieces still adorned with Chinese export garnitures brought back on such voyages by some ancestors who had been officers on trading ships.

On the bowls of jugs brought back to Portugal, there were usually armorial designs to commemorate da Gama's historic establishment of direct trade with the Far East. Mr. Adams told

me he remembered seeing some such pieces when he visited Lisbon some years before. For 75 years, Portugal had no rival on the sea. Then, in 1594, King Philip II closed the Portuguese ports to the Netherlands, whose ships came with regularity to get spices and silks from the Far East. This event stimulated the Dutch and English to form their own companies and to become competitors of Portugal. A few years later, the Dutch East India Company was successfully formed and began sailing to Batavia, Indonesia, bringing home large cargoes of peppers, cloves, nutmeg and as much as 8,000 pounds of mace per trip.

In addition to their own cargoes, the Dutch captured two small Portuguese ships. This was a story which always appealed to Mr. and Mrs. Brooks Adams. One carried close to 100,000 pieces of porcelain which the Dutch auctioned off in Amsterdam. This porcelain was not the usual all-of-a-kind sets of blue and white, but consisted of a great variety of plates, vases, bowls and ewers painted with birds, deer or flowers. The borders were of petal-shaped panels of flowers. Mr. and Mrs. Adams especially enjoyed visiting Holland with its importance in the career of John Adams and its success as a sea power. Their recollections made an agreeable subject for a quiet day at the Old House when porcelain claimed the Adamses' attention. They also liked to talk of how, after an early failure, the English re-established their East India Company and were followed by the French East India Company, and of how, although trade between China and France was always small, French influence was a major factor in the development of the decoration of what became known as export china. Mr. Adams erroneously called it "Chinese Lowestoft." But, from his study of the Catholic Church, he correctly recalled the contribution of the French Jesuits. The French not only introduced designs and art media which the Chinese found intriguing, but brought French Jesuits skilled in Oriental languages, who, acting as interpreters, smoothed the business transactions between the Chinese and European merchants.

Figure 7. Route of Vasco Da Gama to India in 1497. ►


ENGLAND
NETHERLANDS
FRANCE
SPAIN
Lisbon
PORTUGAL
CHINA
Canton
Macao
INDIA
AFRICA
ROUTE OF VASCO DA GAMA TO INDIA, 1497
VASCO DAGAMA, 1497

Another incident which Mr. Adams mentioned repeatedly, and which appears frequently in modern ceramics books, concerns a European gentleman who ordered a dinner set with his coat of arms to be enameled in the center of the plates. As was the custom, he enclosed a sketch of the coat of arms and with it the words "green, blue and red" written at appropriate places to be sure these various colors were used. When his china reached him a year later, he found the Chinese artisans had dutifully copied the words onto the china, not understanding the real meaning.

The quantity of porcelain imported to Europe through England, France, and Holland increased until it was estimated that over a million pieces reached the Dutch market in 1780. This period is significant in the story of the Old House and its porcelain contents, for it was then when John Adams was elected by Congress to go to Amsterdam and The Hague to gain recognition of American independence and to negotiate a Dutch loan to the United States. It was at The Hague that John Adams purchased for the new nation the first American legation building, the Hôtel des Etats-Unis. Since the furnishings were a private matter, Mrs. Charles W. F. Dumas, wife of the unofficial chargé-d' affaires, helped John Adams in selecting them. In doing so, Mrs. Dumas must have been aware of Abigail Adams' preference for blue and white china. In a letter to her husband on November 18, 1780, and in other correspondence, Abigail ordered a dozen "blue and white teacups." Although John's wife was still in faraway Massachusetts, she already knew that ships from China were arriving in Holland with blue and white tableware. At any rate, Mr. Brooks Adams cherished the family tradition that all the "blue and white" Canton china in the Old House had been first used in The Hague. The inventory of what John Adams used in The Hague bears out the fact that the Hôtel des Etats-Unis tableware shipped to the States was blue and white.

It was in this atmosphere created by Mr. Brooks Adams, which mixed scholarship, family history and an awareness of the beautiful, that those of us living in the Old House in 1920 approached the daily table. Except for breakfast, when only Chinese export blue and white was used (fig. 8), Mr. Adams did not wish to have the same set of china used day after day. It was rotated until each type had been used several times during the summer. There was no custom that some porcelains must be saved for "best." To him, at least, every meal was such an occasion.

Figure 8. Canton porcelain, also referred to as Chinese export blue and white, used by John Adams at The Hague.

For luncheon, Mrs. Adams' preferences were likely to be observed (fig. 9). She liked to use Louisa Catherine Adams' bourbon sprig border plates with corn flower decorations (fig. 10). The platters and vegetable bowls were from the Meissen "onion pattern" collection (figs. 11 and 12). The dessert service was without special historic significance.

When certain porcelain was to be used for the formal dinner, Mr. Adams personally made the selection as he walked around the Pantry. After he had given his instructions to the waitress, Molly Lally, he went to the Kitchen to make sure that the soup would be clear consommé and that the main course would be fish, both in keeping with the porcelain he had selected. He would order floating island for dessert.

Figure 9. If no flowers were available from the garden, the most lucious fruits Fanueil Hall market could provide created the centerpiece of the table. ►

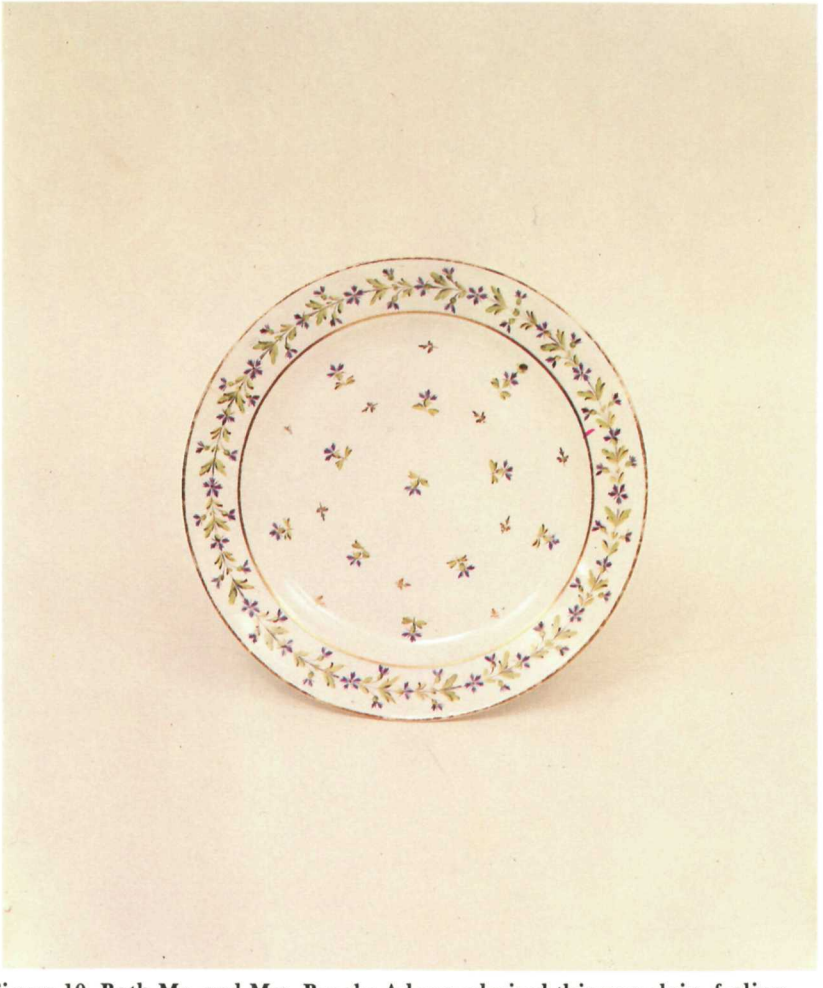


Figure 10. Both Mr. and Mrs. Brooks Adams admired this porcelain, feeling that it was typical of the sensitivity and taste of Louisa Catherine.

Figure 11. On one occasion after a long illness, Louisa Catherine Adams visited the Meissen factory where she purchased this beautiful set of porcelain. Pictured are vegetable bowls.

Figure 12. Meissen meat platter purchased by Louisa Catherine.

Figure 13. This Tucker pitcher of rare quality has the distinction of being the only piece of American porcelain in the Old House.

Dinner was usually at 7:30 p.m. when we gathered at a table set with John and Abigail's silver knives and forks on a handsome white linen cloth. The Tucker water pitcher (fig. 13) was placed at the corner of the table as a representative of Mr. Brooks Adams' parents, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Francis Adams. The first view of the dinner table was breathtakingly exquisite. The initial course of clear consommé soup allowed the chrysanthemum design in the center of each export plate to be visible as one ate (fig. 14). The Chinese export dinner plates, called by John Adams "the red flower" (fig. 15), were used for the main course.

Figure 14. Chinese export soup plates of Abigail and John Adams with the Royal marking on the back.

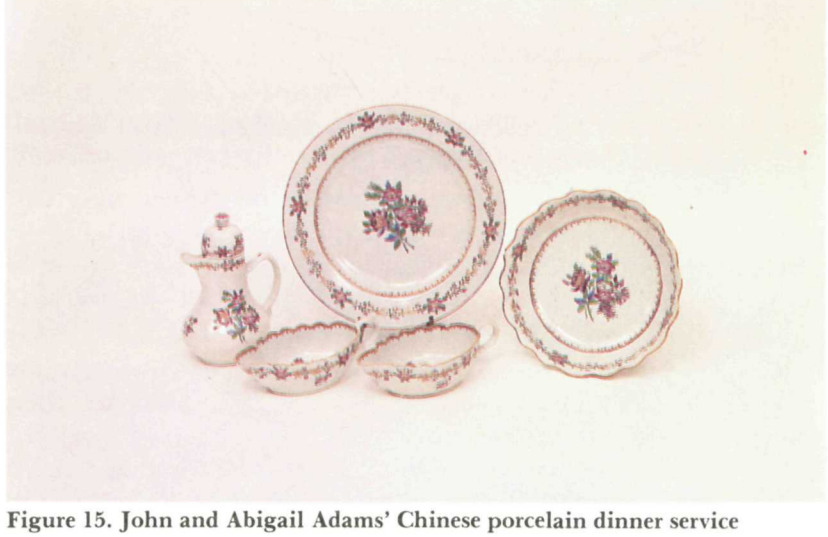


Figure 15. John and Abigail Adams' Chinese porcelain dinner service purchased while John Adams served as the first U.S. Minister to the Court of St. James's.

Figure 16. It is interesting that these magnificent rose center dessert plates draw the attention of thousands of visitors who see the same beauty in them as did the Adamses.

The Chinese export dessert plates decorated with a single pink rose in the center (fig. 16) were also movingly beautiful with all the glittering crystal appurtenances.

Mrs. Adams was always dressed for dinner in a fine evening dress and Mr. Adams would appear in his usual white tie and formal evening suit. Conversation was likely to be a review of John Adams' work in Holland, the Paris Peace Treaty, and finally John Adams' speech to King George III. This address was of special interest to Brooks Adams since it was included in the volumes of John Adams' works edited by Mr. Adams' father, Charles Francis. There was much pleasure in those evenings for both Mr. and Mrs. Adams, and especially as he recalled Abigail Adams joining her husband in Paris in 1784 and her short sojourn in France before her husband was appointed as the first United States Minister to Great Britain. He surmised that his illustrious great-grandmother had to purchase additional porcelain for her use in London because of the high cost of packing and shipping furnishings from the Hôtel des Etats-Unis to

London. When asked why John and Abigail bought so many pieces, Brooks Adams explained that in 1785, the English market abounded with porcelain from China, thus making the price attractive. In addition, he noted that the rise in popularity of the newly made English tableware offered additional competition.

As I recall, among the pieces of the blue and white export, which were formerly used at The Hague, and which evoked much discussion in 1920, were the fish platter (figs. 17 and 18) and another set of soup plates (fig. 19). In their decoration, they are very similar, though Mr. Adams was somewhat puzzled that the color "blue" was so different. Mr. Adams finally decided that this

Figure 17. The fish platter with the trivet allows the water to drain in contrast to the depression in the meat platter which preserves the gravy.

Figure 18. Fish platter assembled.

Figure 19. Canton blue and white soup plates.

type of china was made in some less known province of China. Mrs. Adams had her own interpretation of the symbolism in the decoration and variation of the color; but they both did agree that the trivet was a great innovation to come from the period 1750 to 1775. Mr. Adams was sure that the art of making anything so desirable as this insert had been lost to 20th-century civilization. He surmised that his platter and trivet were made in a factory near Canton, perhaps at Shaokiang.

Another portion of china which had charming association for Brooks Adams is the individual soup tureens (fig. 20). Frequently, Mr. Adams ordered the cook to prepare "Petite Marmite" soup to be served using these tureens at a luncheon placed out-of-doors in the 18th-century garden under the yellow-wood tree near the Old House. The small tureens were considered poor quality by experts in the field of ceramics, but to both Mr. and Mrs. Adams, they were appealing. The single sprig flower was different in color and design from the usual Canton, and the simplicity appealed to them. Because of their inferior quality,

Figure 20. These small tureens with their interesting covers were ideal for outdoor luncheons since they kept the soup hot.

Mr. Adams did agree with the experts that they were made in some small village, perhaps Swatow, a place he had once anticipated visiting.

The celadon garden seats (fig. 21) were conversation pieces. Museum authorities who visited the Adamses were in agreement with Mr. Adams that these octagonal-shaped garden seats were of exceptional quality. Seeing them, he was always inspired to restate his knowledge of archaeological digs, the development of glazes, and a whole recall of his earlier years of research. In a way, the garden seats seemed a part of his intellectual self.

The same was true of Mrs. Adams when she looked at the Vincennes cachepot (fig. 22). She and Mr. Adams had passed a great deal of time in Paris. She loved that city and especially the opportunity there to enjoy music, the art of making and decorating French porcelain, and, of course, the attractive gardens. This beautiful turquoise Vincennes cachepot was her favorite of all, and it also represented the only piece of French

Figure 21. The Adamses used the garden seats on the East Piazza with especially beautiful ferns. Preservation requires that they now be shown indoors.

Figure 22. This Vincennes cachepot is historically attributed to Abigail and was artistically appreciated by each of the Adams ladies because of its exquisite color.

porcelain credited to Abigail Adams by Mrs. Brooks Adams. Her husband's favorite pieces were the Chinese export temple jars which to him represented his mother's fine taste in porcelain (fig. 23).

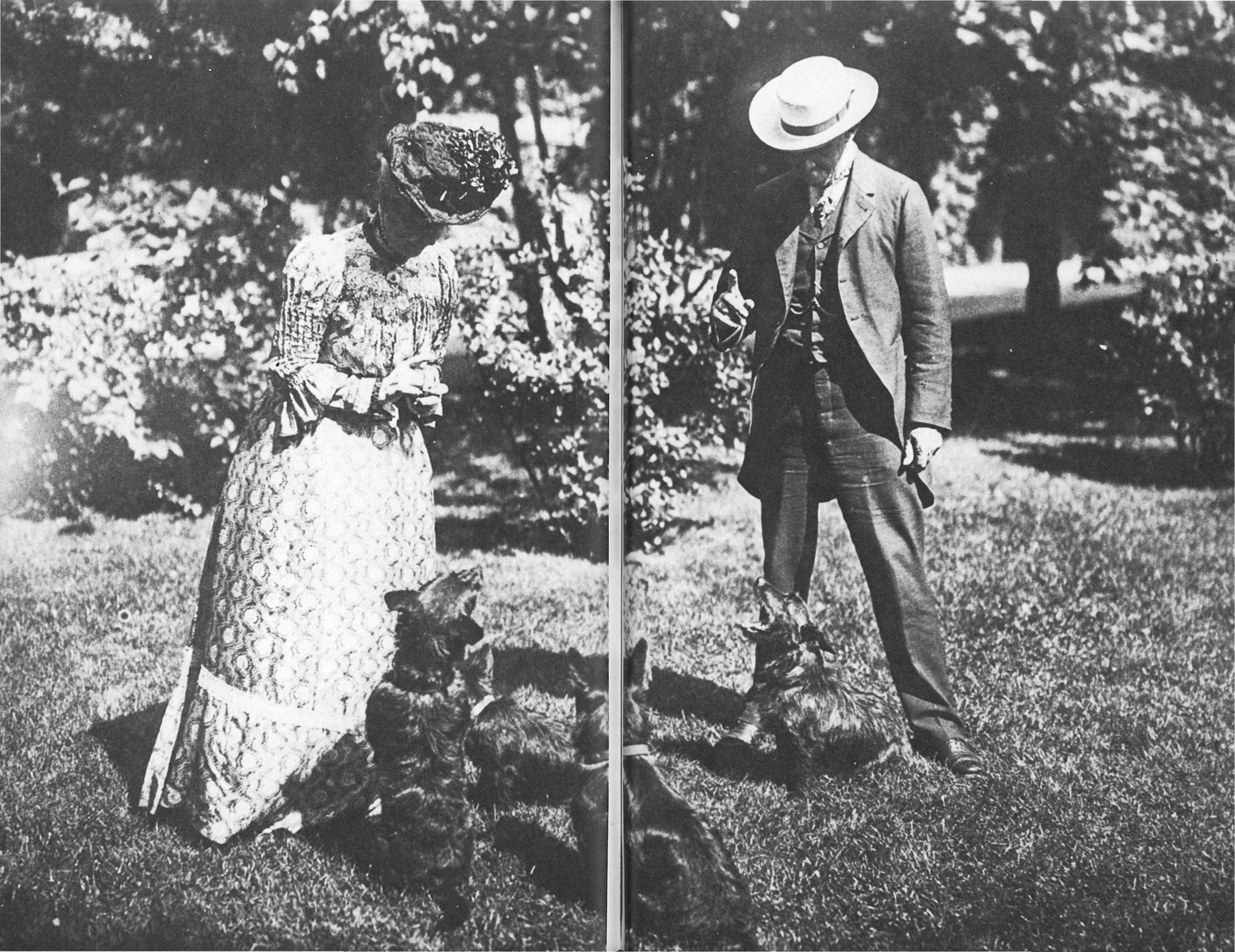
In this fashion, the Chinese export porcelain and European porcelain inspired talk of family as well as of economic and diplomatic history, while I listened during the summer of 1920. However, I also observed how the Philadelphia Tucker pitcher introduced the subjects of American art and that historic city once our seat of national government. Then the sideboard (fig. 24) in the Dining Room, having been brought to the house by Mrs. Adams from her father, Admiral Charles Henry Davis (1807-1877), would lead to a discussion of American history with special emphasis on the growth of the United States as a sea power. Augmented with admiring encouragement by Mr. Adams, Mrs. Adams added many interesting memories of her father's career in the Navy.

Figure 23. Abigail Brooks Adams' Chinese export temple jars.

Thus, during this memorable summer of 1920, was life passed in the Old House amid its treasures. Even Evelyn Adams, who usually talked longingly of what some considered the more fashionable North Shore above Boston, found the days during this particular year in Quincy especially appealing (fig. 25). As the leaves fell and frost nipped the garden flowers, both Mr. and Mrs. Adams were reluctant to exchange the Old House for their winter residence on Beacon Hill in Boston. The move meant they must leave behind for a time the marvelous collection of china in the family home which had brought them both such striking intellectual diversion as they completed the 131st year in which Adamses had lived in the Old House and enjoyed its furnishings.

Figure 24. Mrs. Brooks Adams contribution to the Old House.

Figure 25. Mr. and Mrs. Brooks Adams greeting their dogs. ➤



The Eighteenth-Century Garden

Four generations of the Adams family loved and cherished the eighteenth-century Garden and grounds surrounding the Old House. It was while walking in the formal Garden that an Adams could review successes and reconcile disappointments. The blossoms of the fruit trees offered inspiration for the future; the York rose recalled the freedom of a new nation; and the hanging, flowering cluster of the yellowwood tree annually reminded generation after generation of John Quincy Adams' untiring efforts for justice. Consequently, the Garden at the Adams National Historic Site has always been accepted as a personal responsibility of each of the Adams ladies while each gentleman in the family undertook special projects in it. In fact, Abigail Adams had been attracted by the Garden long before she and her husband purchased the Vassall property of which it was a part. The fact that the Garden contained the finest selection of fruit trees on the South Shore was an important element when Mr. and Mrs. John Adams decided to buy the Vassall estate in 1787, while they were in England where John served as Minister Plenipotentiary.

In 1788, after a sojourn abroad of four years for Abigail and ten years for John, they returned to their new home with its appealing Garden. The country road by which they arrived brought them from Milton, an approach, directly west of their recently purchased property, which must have made the house and grounds look rather ordinary to Abigail when she compared them to places in which they had lived while in Europe (fig. 26). When she and her husband entered the estate, there was only a western gate and a simple path leading to the front door. Abigail commented at the time that the grass had been neatly cut, but she made no mention of flowers growing.

Figure 26. The Vassall House by E. Malcolm

However, she went to work at once to improve the estate. Always an imaginative homemaker, Abigail brought two plants from England: a cutting of the red rose of Lancaster and one of the white rose of York which she planted in the southwest corner of the front yard. Soon afterwards, she placed three lilac shrubs on either side of the path leading from the gate to the front door. Thereafter, each generation valued the lilac shrubs, and they remain one of the main responsibilities of the National Park Service. Because of age, perhaps, the lilac blossoms are very sparse in some years; at other times, they are a lush purple (fig. 27).

Figure 27. Abigail's lilacs shading the front door of the Old House

Later, Abigail planted an althea near the lilacs, while her husband added a horse chestnut tree directly east of them. Then, when John was away serving as President of the United States, the First Lady gave her attention to improving the House as well as the Garden in their new estate. Abigail added the east wing and moved the picket fence to the east corner of this new addition. Then she also built a second walk and an additional front gate. Just who planted the grapevine beside the front steps is not known, though John Adams recalled late in his life that it had been planted before he and Abigail had purchased the property.

In laying out the Garden, the Vassalls, as original owners, had included an entrance from the yard. This path was lined on either side by a dwarf box hedge imported from England. At the corner of the House, the entrance met one of the main garden paths which then proceeded around the fruit trees. These trees dominated the area and were referred to by Abigail in her letters to John. They were removed in 1870, thus providing the clear view we now have of the three long walks leading east and west through the Garden and the three cross walks going north and south. Abigail's mark on the Garden is still to be seen in the wisteria. The original plant is probably long since gone, but it is perpetuated by the original roots. In the spring, there is a pleasant aroma everywhere from the wisteria which now runs to the top of the chimney on the west end of the House as well as along the south side of the Library (fig. 28). Also planted by Abigail on the south edge of the Garden are two sweet bay shrubs which have endured in shoots from the original plants. At the far west end of the Garden are two tree peonies placed there by Abigail sometime after 1800.

We know from references in Abigail's writings that she added daffodils, delphiniums, four o'clocks, and nasturtiums. They were planted near the House, since the bulk of the Garden was occupied by the fruit trees. However, Abigail's interest was not as keen on blooming flowers as it was on vegetables. She can best be remembered for her remarkable energy in constructing outbuildings on the estate for storing farm products and for providing shelter for the cattle (fig. 29).

In the years after John and Abigail's occupancy, later generations of the Adams family left their imprint while tenderly caring for the plants put out by their predecessors on their beloved estate. For instance, John Quincy Adams spoke of his sadness in having to cut down the althea planted by his mother.

Figure 28. Abigail's wisteria and John Quincy Adams' old elm tree.

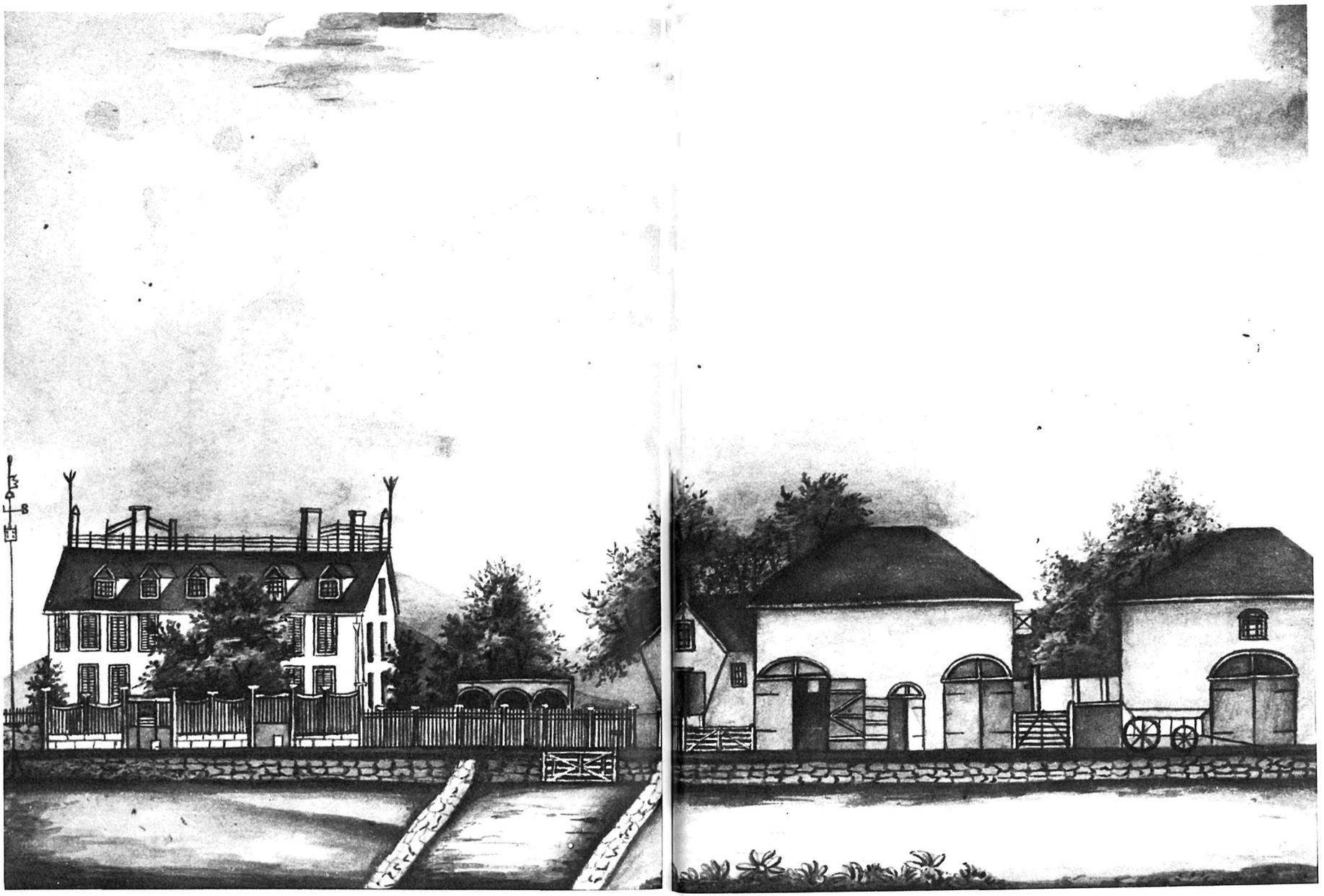


Figure 29. Abigail's farm buildings.

He also found the front gates a great maintenance nuisance, because the posts rotted. To cope with this, he installed the granite posts which can still be seen at the front entrance (fig. 30). He planted several American elm trees, the last in existence still graced the front walk in 1981. John Quincy Adams' interest in trying to grow trees from seedlings was his special enthusiasm. He maintained a dedication to greenhouse activities and to maintaining everything on the grounds which was a product of nature. In the northwest corner, he had a small greenhouse where, whenever he was in Quincy, he would experiment with plants which might enhance the beauty of the Garden and promote his knowlege of horticulture.

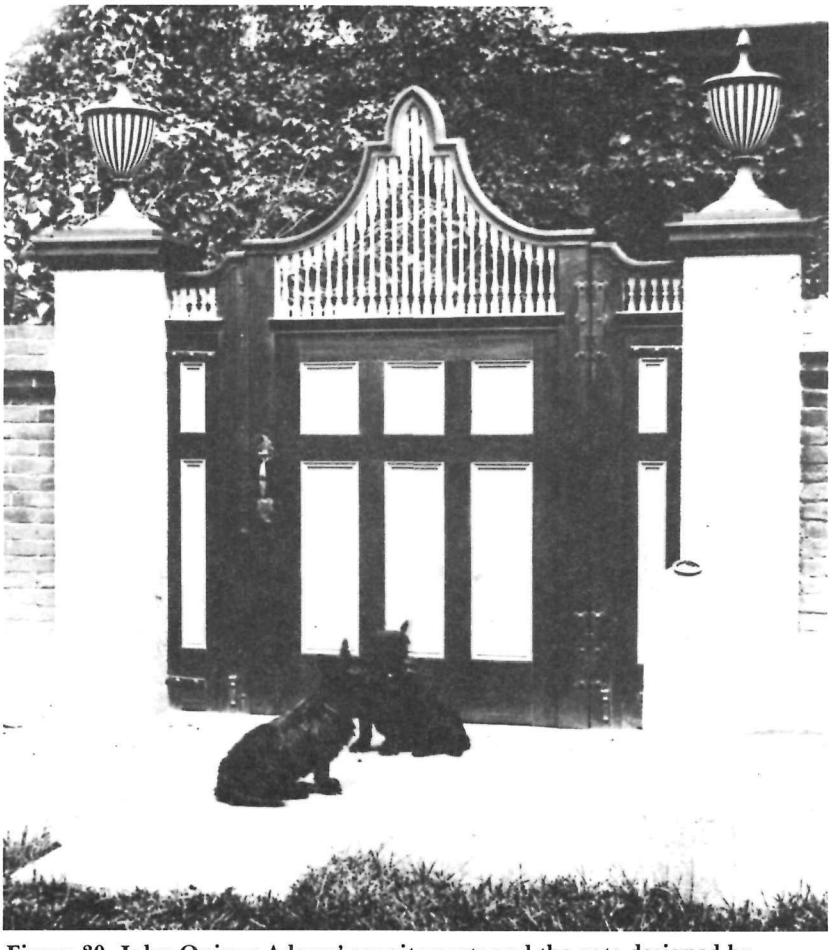


Figure 30. John Quincy Adams' granite posts and the gate designed by Brooks Adams guarded by the "Scotties."

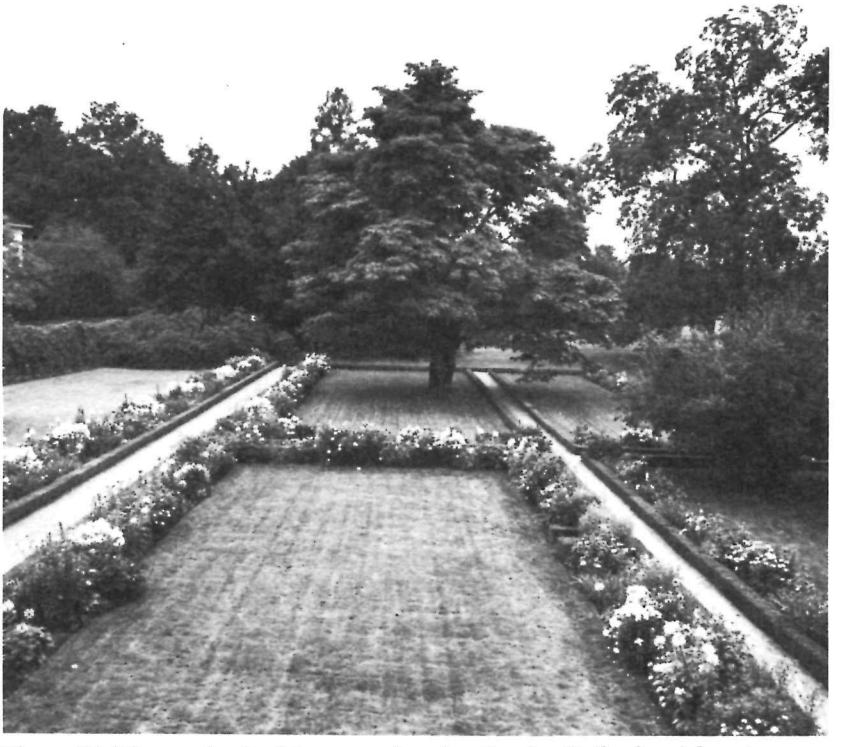


Figure 31. The garden looking west showing Louisa Catherine Adams' yellowwood tree.

He and his wife, Louisa Catherine, took an interest in mulberry trees and the silkworms to which they provided sustenance. During her later years, she brought from Washington a yellowwood tree and planted it among the fruit trees. Though the fruit trees were later moved to the meadow, the yellowwood tree remains an object of admiration by thousands of people who visit the Garden annually (fig. 32). However, on the whole, Louisa Catherine's enthusiasm for poetry and music transcended her interest in growing flowers. John Quincy Adams always said that flowers did not interest him so much as trees, because the former so quickly matured and passed away leaving nothing for future generations. But, his fascination by experimentation did lead him to plant oriental poppies.

Figure 32. A view of the garden today showing the oriental poppies and the yellowwood tree commemorative of Louisa Catherine and John Quincy Adams.

Under the care of the first two generations of Adamses, the Garden beside the Old House retained much of its original Vassall appearance. Changes began after the deaths of President and Mrs. John Quincy Adams when their daughter-in-law, Mrs. Charles Francis Adams, accepted the Garden as her personal responsibiliy. Because of her love of cut flowers for interior decoration, she incorporated flower beds beside the boxwood hedge. Today, her favorites—bleeding heart, iris, day lilies, phlox, peonies, and dahlias—are still retained in the planting of the Garden each season. Of the three corners of the Garden where Mrs. Charles Francis Adams planted rhododendrons, only one has survived the years. When it is in blossom, it is the main attraction in the Garden. She also added a small periwinkle bed near the east front walk, a dutchman's pipe beside the 1731 entrance to the house, and a wisteria which was kept pruned to a

bush form (fig. 33). Abigail's few tulips were cultivated with tenderness and adorned the whole length of the Front Piazza. Meanwhile, Charles Francis Adams carried on—and more successufully—his father's determination to plant trees on the grounds around the Old House.

After 1889, the fourth generation of Adamses undertook its turn to cherish and maintain the family's house and the beloved Garden next to it. As we have seen, the new residents in the Old House, Mr. and Mrs. Brooks Adams, displayed a determination that the famous home of two American Presidents and its surroundings should remain largely unchanged. However, almost as soon as the Brooks Adamses began their occupancy, the York rose and Lancaster rose ceased to bloom. After testing the soil, Brooks found a spot more suitable. Consequently, both rose bushes are today found on the north side of the Garden near the historic boxwood hedge (fig. 34). Brooks Adams was a devoted

Figure 33. The front walk showing the lilacs and Mrs. Charles Francis Adams' Dutchman's pipe.

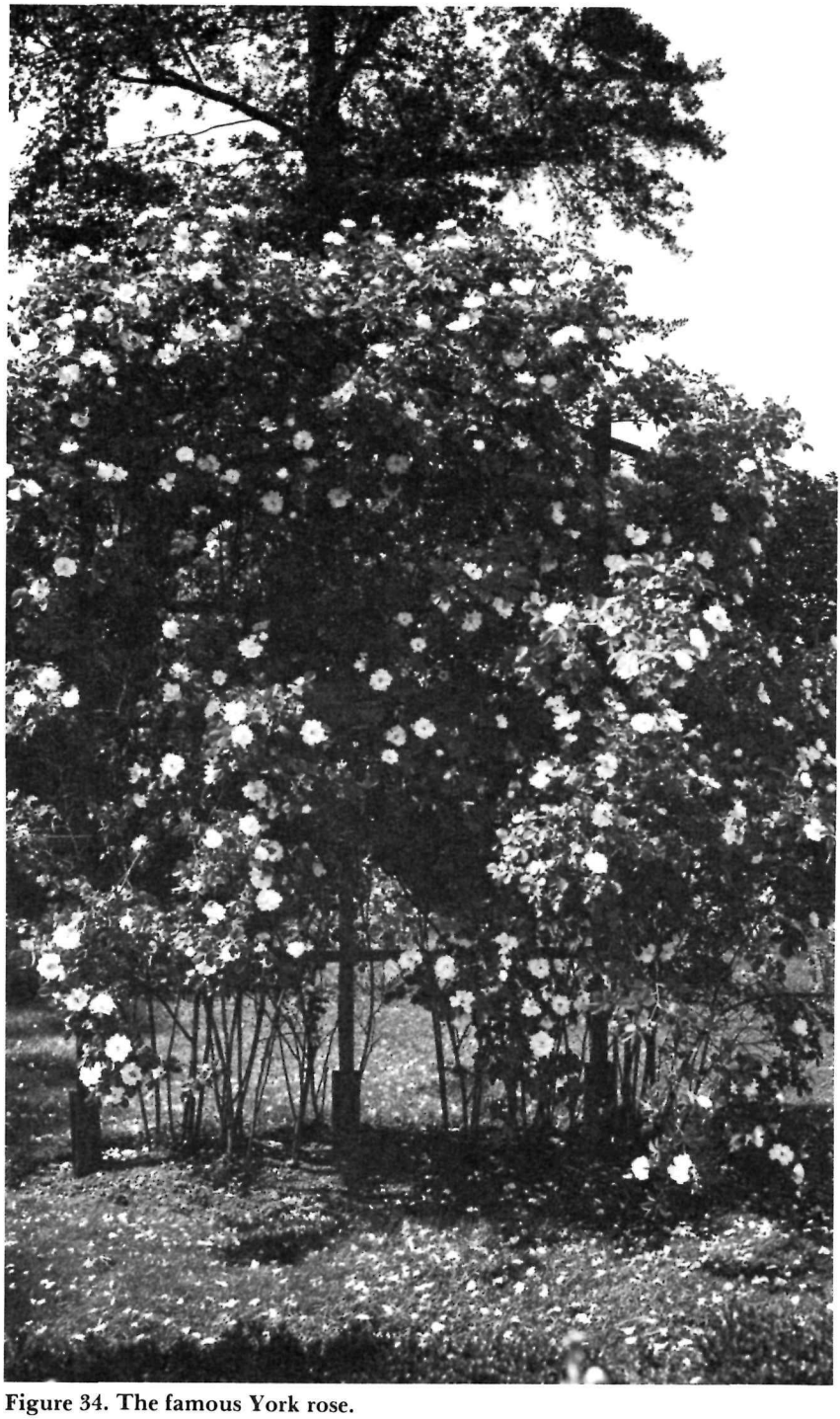


Figure 34. The famous York rose.

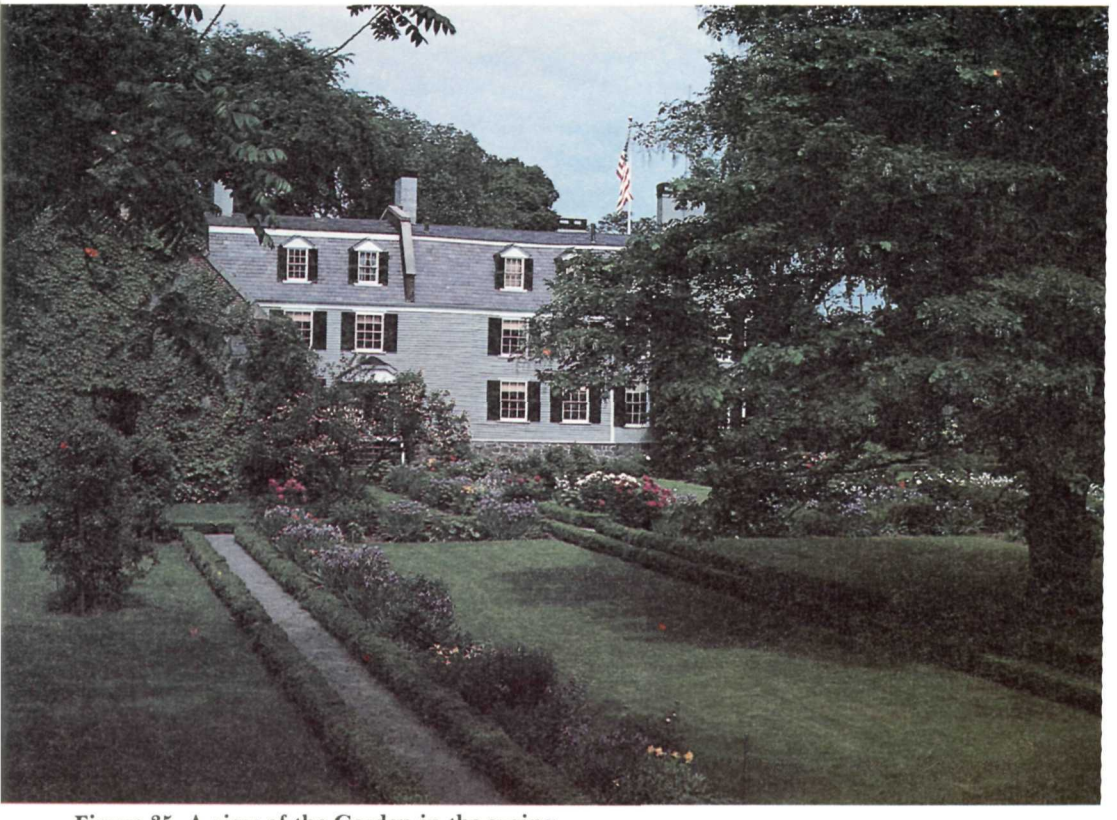


Figure 35. A view of the Garden in the spring.

lover of the Garden and dedicated to the responsibility of maintaining family traditions. During his tenancy, just the plants dear to his mother were kept in the garden, with the exception of oriental poppies planted to recall his grandfather's experimentations in horticulture. He did add what he always called elephant ears, as well as hydrangea, and a plant he spoke of as the sweet shrub because of the pleasing aroma from the little purple blossoms (fig. 35). Mrs. Brooks Adams left her mark by transplanting fern from the lowlands of the Blue Hills to the edge of the South Piazza. She and her husband also planted candy grass, so called by them because of the white stripe. On the whole, however they preserved the yard as it had been in the previous hundred years (fig. 36).

Today, this 18th-century Garden, as cherished by one family for 139 years until Brooks Adams' death in 1927, can still be seen exactly as he left it, maintained by the National Park Service with the family's traditions carefully kept uppermost in mind. This is also true of the lawn to the east of the Old House, an area which endured many changes before it reached its present state. Abigail Adams placed buildings needed to operate a farm in this area. John Quincy Adams had a seminary of 48 circles of beds where he put his young seedlings of fruit trees, flowers, and seed trees, all east of the House. Then in 1874, these buildings and seminaries were cleared away by Charles Francis Adams, and the east lawn became park-like in appearance. Elms, oaks, and a venerable old beech tree, which was ordered from England in 1858 by Charles Francis Adams, still enhance a carpet of very well groomed grass bordered by the 1850 granite wall (fig. 37). It was this setting which Brooks Adams preserved, and which the National Park Service strives today to continue in the same form and spirit, just as the Garden is renewed each year as the Adamses themselves cultivated it.

Figure 36. Ferns along the Front Piazza planted by Mrs. Brooks Adams.

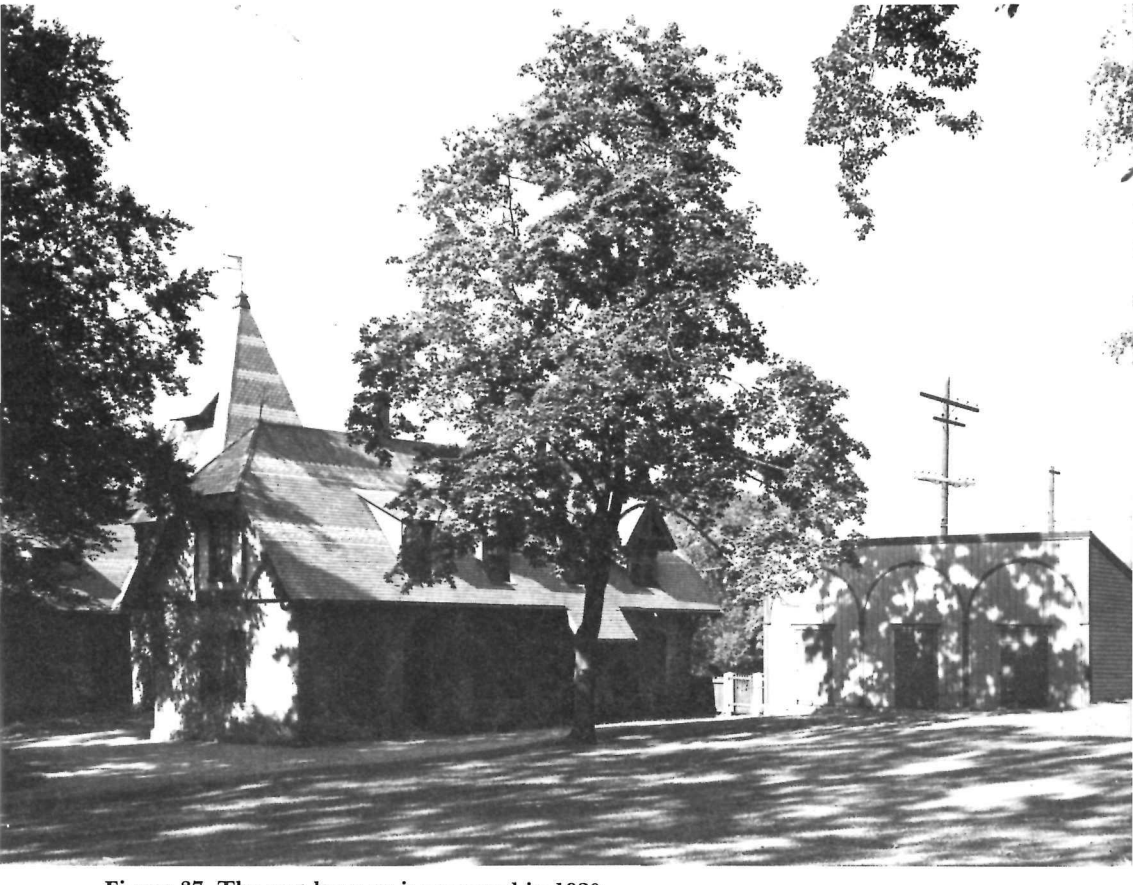


Figure 37. The east lawn as it appeared in 1920.

Figure 38. Eighteenth Century Garden in the early summer. ►

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

For sale by
Superintendent of Documents
U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, D.C. 20402

Designed by Ricardo Lewis