

## May 22<sup>nd</sup>

This is late for Mothers Day but worth writing about. The founding fathers had some interesting founding mother counterparts. Dorothy Quincy married John Hancock after the war began. Actually she and her fiancé's aunt Lydia watched the first battle from an upstairs window in Concord, Massachusetts. Wounded men were brought into the house and she bandaged wounds. Her future husband was hated by the king for protesting the seizure of his house by the British commander back in Boston. Thence John Hancock joined the resistance and signed the Declaration writ large so the lousy king could read his name without his glasses. Dorothy was well-aware of her personal danger in case the Redcoats broke through the door and found her out. Although they were in the thick of war, they made it to the altar and married. We know their vows. From the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, "...to have and to hold from this day forth, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health to love and cherish, until death do us part." Sound familiar?

Abigail Adams was first lady of John Adams and mother of John Quincy Adams, but before that was the pig farm. John was elected to the Continental Congress and their hog farm was outside of Boston. She kept the home fires burning and slopped the hogs ingloriously each day before she wrote inspiring and encouraging letters to her husband. In 1775, after personal sickness and loss of her mom, Abigail could have easily tried to talk her husband, a highly successful lawyer, out of the conflict for the quest of freedom. Instead she wrote him, "Let us separate for a while; they [the British Tories] are unworthy to be our brethren."

Elizabeth Annesley Lewis, wife of Declaration signer Francis Lewis, had an even harder time. In 1775, as soon as the Brits took possession of Long Island, troops were dispatched to hunt down and capture Lewis' wife. She was carried into the city, without time to even gather a change of clothing. Imprisoned with little food and no outside communication, Elizabeth was treated like a low-class criminal. But 3 weeks later, a loyal family slave lovingly brought her clothing and food and secretly carried back a letter to friends. Among them was someone who notified General Washington. He was smart. He immediately ordered the arrest of 2 wives of British dignitaries. Exchange terms were arranged. Elizabeth was placed on house arrest on Long Island as conditions of the terms required. She never fully recovered from her inhumane treatment, yet she wrote Francis every chance she got telling of the horrors she had undergone, yet encouraging him to fight on. After the conflict she had a raft of children who all became prominent.

Family fortunes were lost by most of the signers, stress of the war and lack of supplies contributed to sickness and untimely deaths of their wives. Homes were looted and destroyed, family ties back to England were forever severed, yet most of the women stood like a rock in support of their absentee husbands. If you wish to read a collection of their stories, Dr. Stephen Flick has written *American Matriarchs: Wives of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence*.