

Redeeming the Fathers of America

Andrew Adams 1736-1797

You might be asking this question, “I’ve heard about John Adams and Samuel Adams, but who was Andrew Adams?”

Among the first Puritans to settle in New England we see at least three streams of Adams’ family members fleeing England. One stream, led by Jeremy Adams arrived in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1632. Another stream, led by Captain Joseph Adams arrived in Braintree, Norfolk County, Massachusetts in 1646. A third was led by William Adams around 1628, that is of the direct lineage of our subject, Andrew Adams, a signer of the Articles of Confederation.¹

Tracing members of these family streams can be exhausting and confusing, with descendants populating regions of Massachusetts and those at Hartford, Fairfield County, Connecticut, where we find Samuel Adams, the father of our subject. Also note that there are several men named Samuel Adams across the past 400 years and especially as we get into the 1700’s. Please use caution as I found myself falling into the trap of rabbit-trailing as a result of my assumptions. One thing I can say from the experience, is that each stream had its own dynamic influence upon the future of the colonies, seeding many strong patriots.

On January 7, 1736, Andrew Adams was born the son of Samuel (1703-1788) and Mary Fairchild Adams (1698-1803) at Stratford, New Haven, Connecticut. Samuel was a well-known attorney and well as a judge in Fairfield County. This afforded Andrew opportunity for a thorough education, including studies in history, the languages of Greek and Latin, and other subjects. In 1756, Andrew entered Yale College and graduated in 1760. That same year he married Eunice Booth and the couple went on to have six children.

In 1764, Andrew Adams entered upon the practice of the law at Litchfield, in his native State of Connecticut. His success was immediate, and eminently honorable, becoming one of the city’s leading attorneys. His fine abilities were then devoted to the service of his country in council, having become an ardent Whig.²

In 1772, Mr. Adams served as an attorney for the State of Connecticut or what was commonly called the King's Attorney. He was elected to Congress soon after the great Declaration of Independence was signed and remained an active member, joining delegates from eight colonies in signing the Articles of Confederation on July 9, 1778.³

One of the first court cases Andrew Adams was asked to resolve was a twenty-year old land dispute between the new town of Old Judea and Woodbury, which in 1779 was referred to as Washington. Taxation of property based on defined boundary lines was necessary, but at times those boundaries were questionable. Some thought that was due to the strong Episcopalian sentiment in the region, which often went against the Church of England and the Tories, that they might finally receive a favorable settlement. However, the General Assembly decided not to change the boundary line. Colonel Andrew Adams was asked to stand before the General Assembly and petition the town of Washington be allowed to "regulate the line of the town, in its own way."^{4, 5}

In May of 1776, two cases of prisoner ill-treatment occurred. One was related to a regiment ordered to defend the mouth of the Hudson. When their cause failed, the British bayoneted some begging for quarter, others were taken to containment facilities, like the Sugar-House or prisoner ships. A second, when a deposition was presented on May 3, 1777, requesting Andrew Adams, Esq. examine the ill-treatment of prisoners of war by the British. Thousands reportedly died from lack of light, proper food, water, and exposure to various illnesses in unbearable, tomb-like conditions. It was a horrible reminder of the callousness and wickedness of some. The Hon. Andrew Adams was among those appointed to arrest all suspected persons, and those dangerous to the liberties of American.⁶ More horrific details are presented in Payne Kenyon Kilbourn's Sketches and Chronicles of the Town of Litchfield, Connecticut.

On a positive note, it was common for military leaders to visit the town of Litchfield, including General Wolcott, Prussian General Count Rochambeau, and General La Fayette on his way to the Hudson. General Washington arrived on his way to West Point and was entertained by General Wolcott. That next day Washington discovered the treason of Benedict Arnold.⁷

On December 10, 1777, Andrew Adams joined Tapping Reeve, Seth Bird, Samuel Lyman, and Lynde Lord as Selectmen on a Committee to prepare and present sundry matters and funds to reimburse the town of Litchfield for war expenses.

In June 1780, Colonel Andrew Adams was commissioned to provide fourteen able bodied men of Litchfield, to serve in the Connecticut Line of the Continental Army up to the following December 1, 1780.

A few years before the death of Andrew's father on November 12, 1788, the Hon. Samuel Adams moved to Litchfield to assist his son, the Hon. Andrew Adams, in his extensive practice. Andrew's mother, Mary Fairchild Adams, passed away August 29, 1803, in the 106th year of her age, having lived in three centuries, was of a pleasant temper, amiable manners, temperate habits, and regular in all her deportment".¹

Many considered the Hon. Andrew Adams a friend of the Revolution, he was an active participant in town meetings, where he influenced and promoted the cause of liberty. He rose to the rank of Colonel in the Connecticut militia during the Revolutionary War, was a member of the Council of Safety two years, and of the State Council for nine years, a member of the Continental Congress three years, and Speaker of the House of Representatives in 1779 and 1780.

Connecticut Governor, Jonathan Trumbull wrote to Congressmen Roger Sherman, Titus Hosmer, and Adams on military movements in what is now known as the states of New England. Adams and Hosmer answered the governor's message, stating they would take the opportunity to write to Major Bigelow and keep an eye on the situation through organizing a Board of Treasury, but little progress had been made. After leaving the Continental Congress in 1788, a year later Adams had been named a member of the Connecticut Executive Council by Trumbull. Adams was also granted a seat as a judge that same year, and he was granted the position of chief justice in 1793, which was the position he kept till his death on November 26, 1797.

In 1789, the Hon. Andrew Adams was appointed a judge of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts; and the Supreme Court of Errors from 1789-1798. In this position his profound learning and vigorous mind were fully displayed, and in 1793 Adams was appointed Chief-

Justice of the State of Connecticut. He died on the 26th of November, 1797, at the age of sixty-one years, leaving behind a high reputation as a lawyer, statesman, and patriot. Adams lies buried in the west cemetery located in Litchfield.

In February 1901, Charles C. Moore, Esq., a former member of the Connecticut bar referred to Andrew Adams as one of several patriots whose grand efforts produced the liberties the country was then experiencing. It was also evident that town meetings held at Litchfield County, which opposed British taxation through the Stamp Act, the Boston Port Bill, and other Parliamentary acts, were a declaration that citizens of Connecticut would not tolerate such actions. In fact, Litchfield was one of many that provided the impetus that fed the broader rebellion across the colonies and encouraged the election of Andrew Adams as a member of the Continental Congress and later to become a judge of the Supreme Court."

The Hon. Andrew Adams was said to be the "most distinguished lawyer at the period of the War.⁷ Morris wrote, *"As a lawyer, few exceeded him; especially in managing causes before a jury."* The Litchfield Monitor mentioned it, *"a sad and singular coincidence that Governor Wolcott and Chief Justice Adams (the two highest official dignitaries of the State), both residing in the same village and on the same street should be lying apparently at the point of death at the same time."* Governor Wolcott survived his distinguished neighbor only three days.

Upon a rapidly crumbling marble slab in the West burying ground in Litchfield, is the following epitaph of this eminent man:

*"In memory of the Hon. Andrew Adams, Esq., Chief Judge of the Superior Court, who died November 27, 1797, in the 63d year of his age. Having filled many distinguished offices with great ability and dignity, he was promoted to the highest judicial office in the State, which he held for several years, in which his eminent talents shone with uncommon lustre, and were exerted to the great advantage of the public and the honor of the High Court in which he presided. He made an early profession of religion, and zealously sought to promote its true Interests. He lived a Life and died the Death of a Christian. His filial Piety and paternal tenderness are held in sweet Remembrance."*⁸

This has been Redeeming the Fathers of America.

References:

- 1) Genealogy of John Adams and His Descendants, <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/public/gdcmassbookdig/genealogyofjohn00adam/genealogyofjohn00adam.pdf> and The Cottage Cyclopedia of History and Biography.
- 2) WHIG: an American that supported independence from Great Britain during the American Revolution
- 3) The United States Manual of Biographies and History; James Marshall 1856
- 4) The History of Litchfield County, Connecticut by J. W. Lewis & Co., 1881;
- 5) The Boundary Disputes of Connecticut,
<https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcmassbookdig.boundarydisputes00bowe/?sp=2>
- 6) Prisoners of War in Britain 1756-1815 A Record of Their Lives, Their Romance and Their Sufferings by Francis Abell
- 7) The Library of American Biography conducted by Jared Sparks, Vol. III.
- 8) Sketches and Chronicles of the Town of Litchfield, Payne Kenyon Kilbourn, 1859