Fame

In particular, Adams was insulted by contemporary books written about the American Revolution and its heroes that whitewashed some founders but neglected to account for the important role Adams himself had played. As he wrote to friend Benjamin Rush in 1809, "The history of our revolution will be forever continued by those one end to the other. The answer of Dr. Luzac was that Dr. Franklin's bust was stolen and sent to the north, and to spring General Washington. In his retirement, Adams resolved to the margins of his books to personally revise the written record of American history.

Revisionist History

In the 1780s, the Adams family began publishing their own biographies of America's founding fathers, including John Adams. The two men collaborated on numerous publications, including the first history of the United States, "History of the Rise, Progress, and Establishment of the United States of America." Adams angrily noted in the margins that Thomas Jefferson's listing featured a noticeable elevation in title; yet Adams had served far longer and in many more varied posts. As Adams peevishly scrawled in the margins, "How happened it that Jefferson was an Ambassador, and that first subscriber only a Minister? Oh History! How accurate thou art?"

Enduring Legacy

While John Adams's fame never equaled that of his fellow founding father, Alexander Hamilton, many modern historians regard Adams as an equal if not a more significant figure in the American Revolution and the founding of the United States.

Mausoleums, statues, monuments will never be erected to me. I wish them not. Panegyrical romances will never be written, nor flattering orations spoken, to transmit me to posterity in brilliant colors. No, nor in true colors. All but the last I loathe.

— John Adams to Benjamin Rush, 23 March 1809