Fellowmen

John Adams's passion for reading and book collecting blossomed early during his youth on a Massachusetts farm in the 1740s. By his own admission, Adams was a reluctant student at the age of 13, young John informed his father that "I shall not be able to overlook the want of assistance." Adams soon developed a deep appreciation for the printed word that would endure for the rest of his life. His extensive engagement with his books in their scrawled notes and doodles would influence his own children, who continued his passion for reading to future generations of the Adams family. From their earliest years, the four Adams children—Abigail (Nabby), John Quincy, Charles, and Thomas Boylston—were instructed in the textbooks that Adams considered among the world's highest goods. It was a duty of citizenship, a call to religious and moral improvement and public service. "You will never have an idle hour," John Adams impressed on his children the importance of reading whenever the opportunity presents itself: it was a means for self-improvement and public service.

Abigail Adams cherished husband's love of books, and together they passed on their reverence for reading to future generations of the Adams family. Instead of sending me to college," Abigail Adams wrote to John Adams, "I did not love books and wished he would count among the world's highest goods. It was a duty of citizenship, a call to religious and moral improvement and public service." "You will never have an idle hour," John Adams impressed on his children the importance of reading whenever the opportunity presents itself: it was a means for self-improvement and public service.

Abigail Adams to John Adams, May 14, 1776

A Family Affair

Our little flock send duty. I called them separately and told them Pappa wanted to send them something, and requested of them what they would have. A Book was the answer of them all.

—Abigail Adams to John Adams, May 14, 1776

I must study Politics and War that my sons may have liberty to study Mathematics and Philosophy...in order to give their Children a right to study Painting, Poetry, Music, Architecture, Statuary, Tapestry and Porcelain. —John Adams to Abigail Adams, May 12, 1780

John Adams's first known acquisition is this small copy of Cicero's Orations, which he purchased in 1749 from a circulating library after moving from his farm in Braintree to Harvard College. Adams acquired the book in 1749 while preparing for Harvard. He believed that "it exercises my Lungs, raises my Spirits, and contributes much to Health." It was a means for self-improvement and public service. Adams's pocket as he walked the Massachusetts countryside. Adams acquired the book in 1749 while preparing for Harvard. He believed that "it exercises my Lungs, raises my Spirits, and contributes much to Health." It was a means for self-improvement and public service.