

**LIFE IN A NEW ENGLAND TOWN,  
1787, 1788. DIARY OF JOHN QUINCY  
ADAMS, WHILE A STUDENT IN THE  
OFFICE OF THEOPHILUS PARSONS AT  
NEWBURYPORT**

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Life in a New England town, 1787, 1788. Diary of John Quincy Adams, while a student in the office of Theophilus Parsons at Newburyport by John Quincy Adams

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*John Quincy Adams.*

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1903.

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THE photogravure prefixed to this volume is from a portrait of J. Q. Adams, painted in London by J. S. Copley, in the spring of 1796, and sent by the artist in the early part of the following year as a present to John Adams and his wife. The original, belonging to C. F. Adams, is now (1903) on deposit in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. The facsimile of Mr. Adams's signature is from a letter written a little more than a year after the portrait was painted.

Extracts from the diary which follows were read at the stated meeting of the Massachusetts Historical Society in November, 1902, and excited much interest. It was afterward printed in the Proceedings of the Society; and it is now reprinted by their permission for wider circulation.





ON the 31st of October, 1901, the First Congregational Church of Newburyport, Massachusetts, observed its one hundred and seventy-fifth anniversary, and, also, the one hundredth anniversary of the dedication of its meeting-house.<sup>1</sup> The pastor of the Society, the Rev. Samuel C. Beane, D.D., invited me to take part in the ceremonies of the day on the ground that my grandfather, John Quincy Adams, "was for a few years in his youth an interested and active member of" the Society; and, while such, "he was in a great measure instrumental in obtaining the settlement of Rev. John Andrews, his young Old Colony friend, as minister [of the Church, in which] his family is still represented." Not feeling at liberty to decline an invitation thus extended, it occurred to me I could best improve the occasion by communicating to those gathered extracts from the diary John Quincy Adams kept during a portion of the period of his residence at Newburyport,—a student in the office of Theophilus Parsons, who, nineteen years later, succeeded Francis Dana as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts. The diary in question is contained in two small octavo volumes, bound in calf, bought in Paris, and entitled "Ephemeris." It is the record of a young law student's daily life, and, as such, was kept with more or less detail; but, unfortunately, it is not continuous, covering the whole of one year only (1787) and a portion of the year following. The first detailed entry relating to the

<sup>1</sup> A report of the speeches and proceedings on this occasion has since been published by order of the Society. In it are included about three printed pages of the following diary of J. Q. Adams. Celebration of the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Meeting House of the First Religious Society in Newburyport, October 31, 1901. Newburyport, 1902, pp. 61.

Newburyport experience is of August 9, 1787; the last of October 14, 1788. Mr. Adams's health then broke down, as the result probably of too severe application; for, in almost every entry immediately preceding his illness, he complains bitterly of insomnia, lying awake at times whole nights, and at other times getting sleep only through the use of opiates.

Though I found in this record much which greatly interested me, no use whatever was made of it by my father in his publication entitled "Memoirs of J. Q. Adams"; for it contains little of, so-called, historical value. It nevertheless gives a curious and graphic picture of social, every-day existence in a small Massachusetts seaport during the closing years of the eighteenth century. Its maturity of tone is perhaps its most noticeable feature; but, in reading it, it is well to bear constantly in mind that not only was the writer an exceptional character, but his experience had been so very unusual as to be even yet almost, if indeed not altogether, unique. Born and brought up as a boy in an eighteenth-century Massachusetts country town, in the midst of our revolutionary troubles, he accompanied his father to Europe, still lacking five months of his eleventh birthday, when, one February morning, the two took boat from the beach at Braintree, for the frigate "Boston," lying in the offing. Sent to school near Paris, he there became proficient in French. On this point we get an amusing as well as suggestive glimpse of him from the diary of John Adams, kept during the return from his first mission to France in 1779. At this time J. Q. Adams was not quite twelve years old. He had been in France some fourteen months, and was returning home with his father on the French frigate "Sensible," in company with La Luzerne, the commissioner from Louis XVI. to the Congress, and M. Marbois, the secretary of the commission. Writing when three days at sea, under date of Sunday, the 20th June, John Adams says: "The Chevalier de la Luzerne and M. Marbois are in raptures with my son. They get him to teach them the language. I found this morning the Ambassador seated on the cushion in our state-room, M. Marbois in his cot, at his left hand, and my son stretched out in his, at his right. The Ambassador reading out loud, in Blackstone's Discourse at his entrance on his Professorship of the