Female: Abigail would grow to be the equal of John Adams as confidante and dearest friend. She has really revealed herself as, yes, an 18th century woman, but her concerns sound very modern to us today.

Male: John and Abigail Adams have become so prominent in the minds of Americans because of this collection of papers and the publications that have opened them up to the world.

Female: The story of Abigail Adams in the Revolutionary War is a story of sacrifice, of commitment to country and Abigail rose to the occasion.

Male: Abigail was adamantly opposed to slavery.

Female: She was quite behind-the-scenes dynamo, I think. She warned her husband. You can't rule without including what women want and what women have to contribute.

Male: The backdrop to the Adams' brief occupancy of the White House is one of political defeat and personal tragedy.

Female: She is worried about her husband and defends him against slander. She is concerned about her children, their upbringing, their education.

Male: She could hold her own with anybody, in her own time and since. She was in every way her husband's equal.

Susan Swain: Born in 1744, Abigail Smith married John Adams at age 19. Over 54 years of marriage, they have five children together including a future president. Ahead of her time in many ways, and a writer perhaps unparalleled to any first lady, Abigail pens this to her husband during the American Revolution, "All history at every age exhibits instances of patriotic virtue in the female sex which considering our situation equals the most heroic of yours."

Good evening and welcome to C-SPAN's "First Ladies Influence & Image". For the next 90 minutes we will be learning more about Abigail Adams, the second first lady of the United States.

We have two guests at our table who spent much of their professional careers learning about the Adams and bringing their writings to the public. Let me introduce them to you. Edith Gelles is the author of numerous books including two "Abigail Adams: A Writing Life" and "Abigail and John: Portrait of a Marriage." And C. James Taylor – Jim Taylor is the Editor-in-Chief of the Adams Papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society. Thanks to both of you and welcome.

Well, Edith Gelles, Abigail Adams would in her – adjust by virtue of the fact – just by virtue of the fact of being the wife of the second president and the mother of another president earned her place in history. But you say in your book that she is a historical figure in her own right. How so?

Edith Gelles: Primarily because she left us letters and we have a record of her life. But her letters are not ordinary. They are extraordinary. They're wonderfully, wonderfully written and there are many, many of them. So Abigail was a letter writer at a time when women couldn't publish for publication. So her letters became her outlet and it – they are the best record we have of women's role in the American Revolution and for the period of the early national government of the United States.

Susan Swain: Last week in the Martha Washington program we learned with great sorrow that Martha Washington burned all of her papers, her letters, of her correspondence with her husband George and only two of them remained. We've got just the opposite here thousands and thousands of them. Explain the scope of the trove of materials that you have to work with the scholars, through the writings for the Adams family.

Jim Taylor: The Adams family gave to the Massachusetts Historical Society a collection. We've never counted them individually but probably 70,000 plus documents over several generations and probably about 300,000 pages. For Abigail and John which is the – I think the most important of the collection, there are about 1170 letters that they exchanged over the years.

Susan Swain: How frequently did they write to one another?

Jim Taylor: Well, it was dependent because when they were together. For example, we don't have any letters after 1801 because after John leaves the White House they are together almost all the time. But for periods for example, when there's fairly regular mail delivery between Massachusetts and Philadelphia or later Washington D.C. they wrote at least once a week and sometimes twice a week. I almost like to think they're like phone calls.

Susan Swain: This program is an interactive one which makes it more enjoyable for all of us. We hope you'll take part. In about 15 minutes we'll be taking your telephone calls and we'll put the phone numbers on the screen so you can phone in a question.

There are two other ways you can be involved as well. If you go to Twitter and use the hashtag first ladies we'll include some of your tweets, your questions by Twitter. And you can also go to C-SPAN's Facebook page and we have posted a spot where you can send questions in tonight.

And I'm actually going to start with a Facebook comment. From Sophia Sonnen (ph) and who writes, "She looks like a tough cookie. By looking at the words of Abigail Adams was she in fact a tough cookie?"

Edith Gelles: Oh my goodness, no. Yes and no. In fact, one of the things that is important to understand about Abigail is she started out as a naive, young woman who expect – her expectations were to have a normal life like her mother did and the Revolution disrupted that and her whole life shifted. And this is one of the reasons she become so very great a model for us as women is that she used the opportunity of this disruption in her life to grow as a person. So that she begins as a naive young woman and she does become a very sophisticated, worldly, opinionated, kind woman.

Jim Taylor: I think this is one of the things that makes her most attractive. A good character in a novel develops over time. And she is like a good character in a novel she develops.

Susan Swain: Well, what were her roots? And where was she born and what was her upbringing such that she became a woman of letters?

Edith Gelles: She was the daughter of a minister, Reverend William Smith. Her mother was descended from – if there was nobility in New England, the clergy and the political world of New England of Massachusetts Bay Colony, so that her mother's family were Nortorns and Quincys. And so she grew up in a household that was quite middle class for that time and had two sisters and one brother. She was by all reports sickly as a child and therefore, didn't go to any kind of public schooling of which there were a few. But was educated at home by her mother and she read at random in her father's library.

Susan Swain: When – in the of course in reading her writing, did she become political and can you describe her politics?

Jim Taylor: I'm trying to think. Very early on when John is active at the Continental Congress, she consumes news. And she wants the newspapers from Philadelphia. She wants pamphlets when they're published. So one of the things we know that she is consuming the news at that time. And because all the news was – what was printed. And she begins the – I would say in the – by the middle 1770's that she's onboard.

Susan Swain: And then in what capacity? What was her political thinking?

Jim Taylor: She was an ardent revolutionary. She was very supportive not only in revolution but the fact that John was participating. As a matter of fact, they were partners in everything that he did. And as a matter fact, at some point, he writes to her as thanking her for being a partner in the activities. But later on, I think she is I would say, perhaps more conservative than John in some ways when it came to national politics.

Susan Swain: We will be looking at some of her letters throughout the program. But a very famous one is the – and we used it in the open was her "Remember the Ladies." That's a letter that's of particular interest to you. And you write that the scope of it – we always hear that section is really much broader. Why is that letter significant in understanding Abigail Adams?

Edith Gelles: The letter does many things. She – My sense of Abigail is that she wrote at night and she would enter a kind of reverie in which she just followed her thought pattern wherever it went. And so she changes topics in her letters very many times. And so it starts out with a political statement about why these Southerners can favor slavery and still be – are doing a rebellion against a tyranny.

Susan Swain: And she questions that?

Edith Gelles: And she questions that. And then she moves on and in the middle of a paragraph makes this "Remember the ladies" statement. Then it goes on still further to suggest that if John didn't like this idea -- actually, it was a remarkable thing because he was actually in a position to do something, to make a change because he was on the committee that was drafting the Declaration of Independence. So that he actually could have made a move for women's rights at that time and it's remarkable that she did suggest that.

Susan Swain: Can you give us a sense of what powers women had in society at that time? I mean, they couldn't publish under their own names. They certainly couldn't vote. So how could women be influential?

Jim Taylor: I think the – it's a much more subtle thing and in the same way that – if a decision – and many times a decision is made even today and people think that the husband makes the decision. Well, there's a kitchen table discussion that goes on before that. And I think that probably in the Adams household there were a lot of kitchen table discussions between John and Abigail. And Abigail may not have been more – most obvious in making the decisions but I think that she influenced John a lot. And we know much later after the Revolution when he has his political career that she's very influential in helping him formulates some of his ideas.

Susan Swain: I want you tell you a little bit about what the county look like in 1800s as John Adams was leaving office. We have some statistics that will put on screen to give you some of the scope. For example, by that point and the census in 1800 interestingly was done by John Marshall who went on to the Supreme Court and ultimately done by Secretary of State James Madison, all such familiar names from history in the job of a census chief at that time.

The population was 5.3 million across 16 states. There were 998,000 blacks, about 19 percent of the population only 12 percent of them free. And that 5.3 million was a 35 percent growth in the country just in 10 years since the 1790 Census. One interesting thing though, the average life expectancy if you were born in 1800 was just 39 years. The largest cities in the country were New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore unchanged from 10 years ago.

What are some of the things we should take away from those statistics, that snapshot of America?

Jim Taylor: Well, I think one of the things is there is an expansion going on. And this is one of the things that is very difficult for the Adamses because politics are changing. And the changing politics means that they're New Englanders. They're federalist. And as time goes by and as the population

move south and westward it makes it more difficult for the politics so that they – -– that they believe in.

Susan Swain: And again, we're going to invite your telephone calls. We'll be going to calls in just a few minutes. I'm told that you want to read us a passage from one of the letters.

Edith Gelles: Yes, I would just like to remark on the …

Susan Swain: Sure.

Edith Gelles: … 39-year life span. That isn't exactly accurate to the extent that if children died much more rapidly. So that if a child survived to 12 probably the life span was much longer and many, many people lived into their 70s as the Adamses did.

Susan Swain: What – The Adams' five children, how many of them survive to adulthood?

Edith Gelles: Four.

Susan Swain: Four?

Edith Gelles: Right.

Susan Swain: Right. You're getting a passage ready for us. And you want it to read us from that letter that we talked about earlier…

Edith Gelles: Right.

Susan Swain: … of the "Remember the Ladies?"

Edith Gelles: Right. Well, in this particular letter, Abigail was ruminating about conditions in her life and what was going on in the – her world. And she says, "I long to hear that you have declared an independency." She knew John was on this committee. "And by the way, in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors", which is a bold and remarkable statement for a woman to have made in that era.

Susan Swain: Based on the relationship that we see detailed in the letters, would it have been a surprising thing for her to say to John Adams?

Jim Taylor: No. I don't think so at all. And as I go back to the kitchen table, I am sure that before he rode off to Philadelphia, she felt easier with a lot of ideas along the way. But John in his response notes that there are several groups of people – servants, slaves et cetera are also moved during this time to think about their rights and their independence?

Susan Swain: What was her viewpoint on slavery?

Jim Taylor: She was opposed to slavery. She had a servant, a black servant who in fact had been a slave of her father's. And I think the woman had – what was the story that …

Susan Swain: Phoebe.

Jim Taylor: Phoebe Abdee.

Susan Swain: Yes.

Jim Taylor: But did she have her – did she have the right to be free after the – or continue as a servant. I can't remember the exact …

Edith Gelles: Abigail cared for her for the rest of her life.

Jim Taylor: Right. Right.

Edith Gelles: And after her parents died.

Jim Taylor: Right. Right.

Edith Gelles: And Abigail cared for her. In fact, she lived in the Adams' house when …

Jim Taylor: When they were in Europe. Right. Right.

Susan Swain: But the Adams' business was a farm.

Jim Taylor: Right.

Susan Swain: And so how did they manage to work the farm? What kind of labor did they use to support family labor?

Edith Gelles: Tenant farming mostly. And …

Susan Swain: Tenant farming. So would…

Edith Gelles: … they did have hired labor. They did have – and it became very problematic for Abigail during the war the whole situation of having labor on the land.

I want to go back to the letter just a little bit because the – you mentioned John's response to her and what she does in this letter in addition to saying why is it that Southerners can support a revolution when they themselves keep people in slavery. And then she goes on and says, "Remember the ladies. And then she says, "If you don't pay attention to this, we ladies are going to foment our own rebellion." And then, it goes on further to say that you should treat us the same way that God treats people and she invokes the theory in hierarchy.

In this one letter, she brings out so many ideas. I would suggest that her threat to foment a revolution was one of the – is indicative of one of the ways that the Adams has related to each other and which is they teased each other. And his response to her was a tease also. Well, it sounds to me as if every group, any tribe is going to make a revolution.

And jokes are a way that people have of de-escalating…

Jim Taylor: Right.

Edith Gelles: … an argument and it brings it down to normal. So what they'd really – one of the ways in which they related it seems to be that she…

Susan Swain: Well, these two prolific letter writers. How do they meet each other?

Jim Taylor: They met at her father's house. He went as a dinner guest with a friend, a lifelong friend namely Cranch who – Richard Cranch who then married the elder sister of Abigail's. And Abigail was only not yet 15 at that time. And John was not particular at least in his diary was not particularly enthusiastic about her at first but apparently things changed over the years. But he was nine years older than her, so he was 23, 24 years old.

Edith Gelles: He also had a girlfriend at that time.

Jim Taylor: Oh, right.

Edith Gelles: Yes.

Jim Taylor: And there's amazing story that he was about to propose …

Edith Gelles: Right.

Jim Taylor: … to this woman and one of his friends burst in and broke the mood, I guess you'd would say …

Susan Swain: Right.

Jim Taylor: … and then that she won't often married somebody else and – but it came within a whisker of him marrying or at least proposing to somebody else, right.

Edith Gelles: Right. Exactly.

Susan Swain: He was a lawyer. Would that have been a profession that her family would've and appreciated her falling for?

Edith Gelles: Well, the family lore suggests that it wasn't. And when Charles Francis Adams wrote about it, he suggested that her family disapproved of her marrying a lawyer. But she was also very young when she met him and I think they were being protective of her as well.

Susan Swain: Was John political at that point? Did she know she was going to be choosing a life of politics?

Edith Gelles: Well, no one knew about the Revolution coming. I mean, it's just one thing we have to keep in mind that all of this is happening in a period of time there is no revolution. There is no revolution on the horizon. They think of themselves as British people. And sure he was interested in politics the way young men were and he was I think running for office by this time. Was he…

Jim Taylor: But very, very local.

Edith Gelles: Yes. Right.

Jim Taylor: His trajectory was to be a great lawyer in Massachusetts. That's what he saw. Then he …

Edith Gelles: Right.

Jim Taylor: … was following that line and probably would have been.

Susan Swain: Well, it's important to note because these two were married for 54 years and as we're hearing from our guests were great partners. But this was – even if it was in the beginning not a love match, it grew to become one. And we have as an example one letter. This is called the "Miss Adorable" letter and we're going to show that to you next.

Female: I think what's so appealing about the family series is the intimacy that the letters reveal.

The earliest extent letter we have dates to October 1762 and we call it the "Miss Adorable" letter because that is how John Adams opens the letter. So it's John writing to Abigail. And he says, "Miss Adorable. By the same token that the bearer hereof sat up with you last night I hereby order you to give him, as many kisses, and as many hours of your company after 9:00 as he shall please to demand

and charge them to my account." And he continues, "I presume I have good right to draw upon you for the kisses as I have given two or three millions at least, when one has been received, and of consequence the accounts between us is immensely in favor of yours."

So very teasing affectionate tone. And there's just some wonderful moments in the courtship correspondence.

Susan Swain: It's fun doing these series to bring these founding fathers, people that we see in these very two dimensional poses come to life and have real human personalities. These people were clearly having fun and enjoyed one another.

Jim Taylor: I think this is one of the most appealing things about John and Abigail and some of the other Adamses but particularly John and Abigail. They have a life that you can follow because of the documents. You see them in good times and at bad. You see death in the family. You see triumph. It's – I was going to say it's like "Downton Abbey" but it's not exactly but it's a one – it's a wonderful story and the reason it is, is because we have so many of these documents that there's texture there that you don't have with the other founders.

Susan Swain: Based on well, how you've described her admonitions to John about remembering the ladies. Brenda Elliot (ph) on Twitter wants to know, would you say Abigail Adams was the mother of women's rights in the United States?

Edith Gelles: I think one of the things that we know by reading Abigail's letters is that women were aware of their subordinate role in the 18th century. And because we have Abigail's letters where she writes about this, we know that she wasn't exemplary other women in her period of time. Her good friend Mercy Otis Warren for instance was totally agreeing with her and totally a colleague.

I think that one of the things we've learned in the women's movement in the late 20th, early 21st centuries is that we can trace the movement for women's rights back further and further in history and Abigail happens to be an outstanding example because she left us letters that say these things. She was also was very eloquent. Not everyone could write like Abigail. Abigail was a wonderful writer.

Susan Swain: First telephone call on Abigail Adams comes from Jan (ph) watching us in New York. Hi Jan (ph). You're on.

Jan (ph): Yes. Hi. Good evening. So, while Abigail certainly was one of the first great American female writers, (shouldn't) also be acknowledge that she was a poor mother despite John Quincy since another son committed suicide and another son drank himself to death?

Susan Swain: Thank you. Was she a good mother?

Edith Gelles: Yes. She was a very good mother. I think we live in a post-Freudian world in which when something goes wrong inside of a family, the mother gets the blame. First of all, these children were living through a revolution. Second of all, their father was not at home for 25 years. She was doing it all by herself and she was coping in the situation which was extraordinary. And I think that applying 20th – 21st century standards to mothering and even the psychology that has developed in the early 20th century doesn't fly for the 18th century.

Susan Swain: Mary (ph) is up next in Santa Rosa, California. Hi Mary (ph).

Mary (ph): Hi. Thanks for taking my call. I'm interested in finding out what's the relationship between Abigail and Thomas Jefferson was? Did Abigail and Thomas Jefferson correspond during John and Thomas's year of not really speaking to each other? I've also heard that Abigail was really had an intimate relationship with him as far as correspondence went and I'm wondering how true that is?

Jim Taylor: They were very good friends at one time. I think the highest point of their relationship was when Abigail was for a while in France and then in England Thomas Jefferson was a diplomat abroad at that time. And was – they were very close. They're very close. As a matter of fact, for a while, while Jefferson was in Paris and she was in London, they bought goods from one another and kept little accounts for one another.

Also, at one point, one of Jefferson's younger daughter came from Virginia to France but stopped in London on the way and Abigail took care of her during that time. During the national period when particularly after the election of 1800, their relationship really fell apart. It was over politics. And I would say during that time Abigail was very disappointed with Jefferson.

Susan Swain: Next up is Matt (ph) in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

Matt (ph). Hi. Thanks for taking my call. I was wondering what some of the intellectual and stylistic influences on Abigail's writing was. You know, other letters that she might have had and how they would have been influenced upon.

Susan Swain: Thank you. Did she have influences on her writing?

Edith Gelles: Oh yes, of course. She was a great reader. And this is the beginning point of learning to write well of course is to read good literature. And she read the Bible. She read Pope but I'm going to let Jim also talk to this.

Jim Taylor: When we do the research on her letters, one of the things we – if she is quoting somebody or citing somebody, we always want to identify who it is. But sometimes since she's not using quotation marks because people in – educated people on 18th century knew a lot of things automatically. And I would say the things that she quoted most often or things that she referenced most often were Shakespeare, the Bible, Alexander Pope and the classics.

Susan Swain: This next call is from their hometown, Quincy, Massachusetts. This is Kila (ph). You're on.

Kila (ph): Yes, hello and congratulations on having this wonderful series on the first ladies. You know, I live in Quincy, Massachusetts and we are very lucky to, you know, see and experience and breathe the Adamses' life up close everyday. And my comment was going to be about Abigail's statement or sentiment about "Remember the Ladies" because I think that she pretty much, you know, pave – not the paved the way but, you know, she shone or she put the light on the fact that women can shape and change destinies, not just of one's life but of nations and of the world if they set their mind to it. And it's really important because, you know, women are the primary factor in children – in bringing up the children, so. And especially she did it at – just at the brink of, you know, of United States as we know it today because, you know, they were – instrumentally the Adamses are very instrumental in the constitution in forming of this nation.

So – and in fact, Quincy is actually the birthplace of the American Dream. So, I think that she may not be formally recognize as, you know, primary role – her primary role in women's rights, but I think she definitely had a very, very important role in shaping women's place in this country and in history.

Susan Swain: Thank you Kila (ph) and since that's a – as a comment and observation rather than a question. And that caller was from Quincy. We'll take you next to the Quincy home of the Adams as we prepared to tell you the story of the Revolutionary times in which the Adams lived. Let's watch.

Female: The story of Abigail Adams in the Revolutionary War is a story of sacrifice, of commitment to country and Abigail rose to the occasion. For the first 10 years of their married life, John and Abigail lived in this home from 1764 to 1774. It's where they raised their four children. This was the birthplace also of their second child, John Quincy Adams who went on to become the sixth president of the United States.

It's also an important home because the primary link between she and John Adams who was serving in Philadelphia at the Second Continental Congress would be letter writing. And it was from this house that he was provided a window to what was happening back here in the colony of Massachusetts during the Revolutionary War. Abigail would report to John about the militia in Boston.

During the Battle of Bunker Hill on June 17th, 1775, she took her young son John Quincy right over to Penn's Hill down the road, a high point in Braintree and she would watch the Battle of Bunker Hill with her son and report to John Adams of the fires and the smoke rising from Charlestown. She was literally the eyes of the Revolution to John Adams and essentially the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia.

In Abigail Adams' parlor, we're in the hub of the household. This room in particular could be really considered the classroom for Abigail, the school mistress and her four children. During the war one must remember, the schools were closed down, so the children did not benefit from a formal education instead it was up to Abigail to teach them the lessons. Not only arithmetic and French but also morality, literature and what was going on in the Revolutionary War. She was their primary educator here in this home and this is the room were many of those lessons would have taken place.

She reported to John Adams during the Revolution at one point. She began to take up the works of Rollin's ancient history and she was having John Quincy read her at least two pages a day. Now, I don't know if anybody has ever read Rollin's history but for a seven-year-old boy to accomplish this, he had a very good instructor in Abigail Adams.

During the occupation of Boston there were many refugees leaving from Boston out into the country and they needed a place to live. Ever the patriot, Abigail Adams wanted to open the home next door, John Adams's birthplace for these refugees. Abigail rented out the house to a former named Mr. Hayden and his son. They would provide assistance to Abigail on the farm here.

She reported to John in one of her letters that she met with some very ill treatment. She asked Mr. Hayden to share his house with the refugees but he refused. By the time Abigail received a response from John Adams, like many things she had solved this problem herself and reported to John later. She had taken care of the problem and paid Mr. Hayden to leave the premises therefore, providing the opportunity for her to house refugees fleeing from Boston.

There are troops that are marching in her yard practicing their maneuvers in preparation for war. She reports to John that young John Quincy is out behind the house marching proudly behind the militia.

At one point there were militia living in the upstairs attic and also the second floor. She welcomed these militia men to her home and supported the Revolutionary War with her actions.

Susan Swain: The Adams' life in the trajectory of it put them in the biggest events of our founding days of our country. And we have a timeline of some of the key of times in the Adams's life and now that's we all learned in our history books. You can see at 1744 when she was born and married John Adams 20 years later. Soon after that the Stamp Act, then in 1770 the Boston Massacre. And that will go on as you're watching that timeline. I wanted to ask Edi about how endangered the Adams family were living in the midst of this preparation for war and having as being sympathizers against the existing government.

Edith Gelles: Well, for the first decade of their marriage, Abigail and John lived together. It was during this decade that the events happened that as the war – that the events escalated towards war. So this was a kind of simultaneous parallel occurrence at the personal level and then the more global political level.

During this period of time, there was not danger. There was danger once Lexington had Concord that happened once there was fighting in the Massachusetts Bay Area. Yes, there was danger. And more than that, they didn't know if there would be danger. They never knew where the next troop deployment was going to happen.

So she was ready at any minute to move away from the house, to move inland, to take her children and bring them to safety.

Susan Swain: And how much during those critical years? How much time was she alone while John Adams was off working on the foundations of the government?

Edith Gelles: Oh, my goodness. From 1774 until 1784 they were apart most of the time. He came home a couple of times for a couple of months. But during that time she was alone on the farm by herself bringing up the children.

Susan Swain: And she was writing these letters explaining the situation. How concerned was he about his family back in Massachusetts?

Jim Taylor: I think he was very concerned. There's one through a heart-wrenching period where she's pregnant and she is writing right up until the time that she begins labor and because of the time and distance which is something that's so hard for us to understand now with our instant communication. He is writing hoping that she's going to have a daughter and everything will be fine. In the meantime, she's – the infant's born dead and she had a premonition that this was going to happen. So while he's writing happily, joyfully, she has buried this child.

So there's – he knows that she's capable of doing almost anything that a woman or a man could do during that time. But I think there's a certain helplessness on his own his part. He's so consumed by what he's doing there but then reflects and he will send letters, you know, kiss little Tommy and Johnny and it's very – a lot of it is very emotional, very emotional.

Susan Swain: When war broke out, I read that she was so supportive of it. She would do things like help the effort by melting down pewter housewares, plates and cups so that they could be made into bullets. Was that very common for the people at that time?

Edith Gelles: Sure. Sure. People were doing that altogether. Yes. And I'm going to pass on this.

Susan Swain: OK. We were – I think the second couple of more calls as we learn more about the Revolutionary years of the Adams'. Next is a call from Denise (ph) in Rochester, Michigan. Hi Denise (ph). You're on.

Denise (ph): Hello. I'd like to know if the miniseries from HBO that John Adams was reflective in anyway of how things really were in her life in a sense of family and everything? I know they didn't go too deep into that. But also, I'd like to know when you talk about five kids, was that the baby who died? And was that correct about the man – the son drinking to death? Thank you.

Susan Swain: Thank you very much. OK. First, the HBO miniseries which brought the Adamses to the forefront for a lot of contemporary Americans.

Jim Taylor: Right. Right. I think it was good history. There were part of it – it was drama also so you have to understand in order to make it appealing though it was – there are little license was taken but I think generally it was pretty good history.

Susan Swain: On the children, there is this tweet to add to that caller's question. Abigail raised children for 25 years alone as John Adams was busy? Wow, a woman of steel. So that caller asked about the five children and did it include the child who died, so.

Edith Gelles: Right. Yes. The child who died was the third child, born before Charles.

Jim Taylor: Susanna.

Edith Gelles: So there was Abigail. There was Abigail Jr. then there was John Quincy …

Susan Swain: That one's Abby, is that correct?

Edith Gelles: … and Abby. Then there was John Quincy and then there was a third child named Susanna who lived only a year. And there is very little reference to this child in the correspondence. We know very little about it. And then there is – Abigail was pregnant at that time of the death of Susanna. And her third child Charles was then born.

At the end of her life, when her daughter-in-law lost a child and the daughter-in-law was at that time in St Petersburg, Louisa Catherine. Abigail wrote to her. For the first time that I've seen in the correspondence, maybe you've seen it, she made a reference to having lost a baby daughter. It was a closed topic.

Susan Swain: And the caller also wanted to know that the son who was an alcoholic and died of the disease.

Edith Gelles: Yes. Charles. People did not know about alcoholism in those days and it was considered sinful. It was not considered a disease. Charles is throughout the correspondence treated as a person who was sensitive. From the earliest years he was sensitive. He went to Europe with his father and John Quincy in 1779 and he had to come back because he was homesick. And thereafter, every reference that one sees about him is that he was a sweet child, a very pleasant child, but also fragile and may have gotten into some trouble when he was in Harvard.

So his life was irregular. If you want to add to that …

Jim Taylor: And you know from the correspondence between Abigail and her sisters for example that they kind of kept an eye on him. That there was a problem and it's never fully discussed as a young man but …

Edith Gelles: Right.

Jim Taylor: And I think that one of the things that was difficult for Abigail was that her brother was an alcoholic also.

Edith Gelles: Right.

Jim Taylor: And left his family and.

Edith Gelles: Right.

Susan Swain: This viewer on Twitter says, Abigail Adams sounds most like Eleanor Roosevelt of all the first ladies. If she had been born in the later age, would she have been as active as Ms. Eleanor Roosevelt? Can you speculate that one?

Edith Gelles: Well, that's really hard to suggest. I mean, if you're really taking some yes. I mean, she certainly would. I mean, she had all of the attributes of a very dynamic woman who is opinionated and would have had her own goals to pursue and would have been very, very influential. She was very influential in the presidency, we know.

Susan Swain: Well, in fact, along historians and there have been about four surveys of historians over the course in the past couple decade. Abigail Adams always comes in in the number two or in number three position as most influential? Why is that can you speculate?

Jim Taylor: Who would be number one?

Edith Gelles: Eleanor. Eleanor.

Susan Swain: Eleanor Roosevelt, I think. Yes.

Jim Taylor: All right? Then who would be two if it wasn't it?

Edith Gelles: Well …

Susan Swain: Well, she was two, three of the four times…

Jim Taylor: OK.

Susan Swain: … so, we've done it.

Edith Gelles: Yes.

Susan Swain: So, why did she end up in the number two spot?

Jim Taylor: Well, I think one of the problem is that she's – there's a distance in time and people still have other images. People know. People are still alive that knew Eleanor Roosevelt and she's modern. It's the same thing. If you did a survey now, Jacqueline Kennedy would probably rate much higher because people know and really liked her at that time.

Susan Swain: Yes.

Jim Taylor: Abigail – the only thing we have from Abigail are the letters.

Susan Swain: And she's still in the number two spot.

Jim Taylor: And she still in the …

Susan Swain: My point is two is not bad.

Jim Taylor: No, no, no, no, no

Susan Swain: … with the list of first ladies…

Jim Taylor: Right. Right.

Susan Swain: … that you've seen throughout this 200 year spectrum of this being of the second most influential among first ladies based on the letters that you've been spending your career …

Jim Taylor: Well, I think also, if you see her influence on her husband, I don't know that there were many – there have been many first ladies that have had that kind of influence.

Edith Gelles: Yes.

Susan Swain: What's a specific example of an important policy that you see that she really worked on him?

Jim Taylor: I don't know of a particular policy, it's that he consults her all the time. She talks – her letters at a certain point are divided into two things. This is what's happening with the children, this is what's happening on the farm, here are my thoughts about politics. So –and she shared all the time. And I think by the time he got to be president and he was not popular with his party, she was his major advisor.

Edith Gelles: Yes.

Susan Swain: While we're talking about letters, here's another in a video piece of a letter, Abigail to John Focus on Virginia.

Female: The "Remember the Ladies" letter is a letter that everyone knows and associates with Abigail Adams. I think what is lesser known and what is fascinating about the letter is that the "Remember the Ladies'" comment comes quite far down in the letter. In the first section of her letter to John is questioning and voicing her concerns about Virginia's role in the Revolutionary War.

She writes, "What sort of defense Virginia can make against our common enemy? Whether it is so situated as to make an able defense? Are not the gentry lords and the common people vassals? Are they not like the uncivilized natives Britain represents us to be?" And she continues and probably one of her most pointed comment on slavery, "I have sometimes been ready to think that the passion for liberty cannot be equally strong in the breasts of those who have been accustomed to deprive their fellow creatures of theirs. Of this I am certain that it is not founded upon that generous and Christian principle of doing to others as we would that others should do unto us."

Susan Swain: How influential was this opinion about enslaved people on John Adams's thinking?

Jim Taylor: I think John Adams had to be more practical. He's in Congress. He's dealing with these people and he can't alienate them. He couldn't say – maybe he could because he was out spoken. But he had to uphold this together. It's easy to be a critic when you're not there and I think that throughout the first 60 years of the country, people had to tread softly in order to keep the union together.

Edith Gelles: That's right.

Susan Swain: OK. So we're going to fast forward. The country is formed. The Washington's are – and elected president and are serving first in New York and then Philadelphia. And John Adams is vice president to the Washingtons. What were – how did he and Abigail decide their household? Did she move to New York? Did she move to Philadelphia? How did they arrange all that?

Edith Gelles: He – John was vice president for eight years. She moved to New York for one year, the first year because the capital was New York for the first year. And she loved it. They had a beautiful house on the Hudson overlooking the city of Manhattan and overlooking New Jersey shore and she loved it. And she was also happy because her daughter lived nearby. Then they moved to Philadelphia. And she spent the entire year ill. It was not a good climate for her. And her health was always precarious.

So, she decided after that year in Philadelphia, they decided together that she would stay at home. And there wasn't really a precedent for a first lady and the second first lady, the vice president's wife to be living with the men. It was by choice. Martha did it. But Abigail had the liberty to choose to go home and she did for the next six years.

Susan Swain: On her illness, we learned last week that the city of Philadelphia was decimated at the start of the second Washington term by yellow fever.

Edith Gelles: That's right.

Susan Swain: Twelve percent of the population died. Did she have any illness related to that?

Edith Gelles: No.

Susan Swain: What was her illness?

Edith Gelles: Well it's very hard to tell all of these years later. She describes symptoms but it's hard to put a name on the symptoms. I don't know maybe …

Jim Taylor: They say rheumatism.

Edith Gelles: Rheumatism. She did have rheumatism. But beyond that the symptoms she describes are very hard to diagnose.

Susan Swain: Jim Taylor, she was – there was no role model for being the second lady at that time. But Jane Spear (ph) ask by Twitter, did the newspapers of that time mention Abigail?

Jim Taylor: Boy, I'm not really sure about that. They certainly mentioned John from time to time, although …

Susan Swain: Was she a national figure at that time?

Jim Taylor: No. No. No. Not at all. She was known because she had been the wife of the minister to Great Britain. One of the problems that they had was that people thought that they were monarchial, that they were – they had been tainted by their time in Europe. And I think this is one of the interesting things about Abigail. She grows up a minister's daughter and at some point she's at Versailles and at the Court of St. James. So she is an extraordinarily sophisticated person by that time, much more so than Martha Washington.

Edith Gelles: Right.

Jim Taylor: Martha Washington was American elite …

Edith Gelles: Right.

Jim Taylor: … Abigail was international.

Edith Gelles: Right.

Susan Swain: And what of the relationship between Martha Washington and Abigail Adams?

Edith Gelles: It was wonderful. Abigail loved Martha. She met her when she was the wife of the vice president. And whenever they had social events they were very close. And Abigail wrote – whenever she wrote about Martha which wasn't that much, but when she did write about Martha it was in the most glowing terms. And …

Jim Taylor: One of the things she did is that just after she knew that John was going to be elected, she wrote to Martha Washington asking her about how to be the first lady, about etiquette and how she would carry on it.

Susan Swain: And we know that …

Edith Gelles: And Martha wrote back and said, "You know inside yourself how to behave."

Susan Swain: And we know that is a tradition that continues today for new …

Edith Gelles: Sure.

Susan Swain: … incoming first ladies reach out to the people who have served before to understand the enormity of this task. Here is a call next. It is from Ron (ph) in Everett, Washington. Hi Ron (ph).

Ron (ph): Good evening. Thanks for the program and thanks for taking my call. I've read in this – one of Ms. Gelles' books and I've read some of the earlier works by Joseph Ellis and David McCullough on John Adams, but I still think the most comprehensive biography, although technically of John Adams but really of them both was one done in – more than half a century ago, two volumes by Page Smith. I think that really still stands out and I just wanted to get your comments on that.

Edith Gelles: I think no one writes about John Adams today without consulting Page Smith. He is the foundations for writing about him. And remarkable to me because the Adams papers had just been opened to the public at that time when he started writing his book. And yet they're so thoroughly researched.

Jim Taylor: That was the first thing that I read in graduate school. That was my introduction to John Adams.

Edith Gelles: That's right.

Susan Swain: Well, the caller was nice to mention some of your books. I want to show some of them because we're hoping along the way people will be intrigued enough to read more. Here is one "Abigail Adams: A Writing Life." Another, "Abigail and John: The Portrait of a Marriage." And here's one more, I'll put on the screen here, "My Dearest Friends: Letters of Abigail and John Adams." This is one of your books here.

Are these letters approachable for the everyday person? I mean, can you just dive right in and get a sense of this person that …

Jim Taylor: Yes. You might need a little historical context to understand a few of the things that they're alluding to, but the letters are personal. And in some ways they are timeless because they talk about problems that people have today, concerns of people have today. Not the political context but the intimate – this intimacy of the letters.

Edith Gelles: I would add to that. That first of all, your book is excellent because of the footnoting and you do take people into it. But also Abigail's letters have been in print and she's been read since 1840 when her grandson first published an edition of her letters which went through four editions in the 1840s. And it was – she was a best seller through the 19th century. People knew her. She's always been famous for her letters.

Susan Swain: I can't – I won't be able to find the tweet as quickly as I need to right now but someone did ask the question, did the Adamses ever think about their letters being published? Do you have any sense of …

Jim Taylor: Yes. And as early as 1776 John is telling her to put the letters up, to keep them. And I think at a certain point, there's almost a consciousness in some of the – particularly his letters. They know at a certain point and I don't know when they cross that threshold that they're important. And at that point – it's one of the reasons that the family saves the letters.

Susan Swain: Right.

Jim Taylor: Early on it's emotion with the "Miss Adorable" letter and things like that. But after a while, their letters extend from 1762 to 1801, almost 40 years, the most important 40 years in American history.

Edith Gelles: And they understood they were players in it and that they writing for the ages.

Jim Taylor: That's right. I believe so.

Susan Swain: This is a tweet from Big John 9981 (ph), who said, last week you mentioned that Martha did not like John Adams. How did this affect the relationship between Martha and Abigail? So, one of the …

Jim Taylor: I don't know that that's true.

Edith Gelles: Yes. Yes.

Susan Swain: I think what we've said was that Abigail and Martha's friendship helped facilitate the relationship between Washington and Adams. When they were trying to understand what a president and vice president might do. Can you see any evidence for that?

Jim Taylor: I don't know. I think that John and George Washington got along pretty well all the time. And John Adams was extraordinarily supportive of Washington and was personally injured when some of the press turned on Washington, couldn't believe it. This is one of the things. Martha and George were a hard to act to follow and they knew they were going to be difficult.

Susan Swain: We will move in to the years of their one-term presidency. Before that video, it's a time when in one of your books you called it a splendid – using Abigail Adams' words, "A splendid misery being in the White House." Explain what that phrase meant.

Edith Gelles: Oh, it's meant that it was splendid and that they were at the pinnacle of his political career and her career. I mean, they had risen to the top and it was nothing but trouble and agonizing trouble from the very beginning. At very first, John was enthusiastic about becoming president and Abigail said, "Well, I'm going to stay here in Quincy because I've got things to do" and John's – she was taking care of John's mother and she said, "I won't be there until October." And he said, "That's fine, you don't have to come until October."

And then once he was in the presidency, he discovered it was the loneliest place in the world and he started writing letters, "Drop everything that you're doing. Come here. I need you immediately." And she did.

Jim Taylor: I think one of the interesting things, one of the reasons that she was hesitant about it is she said, "I like to be outspoken. I like to speak my piece." And she knew that in that context she couldn't when she was in Quincy she could.

Susan Swain: And where she was in Quincy at that time was the house that they built together called Peacefield. Let's take a look at it.

Female: In 1787, Abigail realized they had outgrown their little cottage at the foot of Penn's Hill. And she began to negotiate through her cousin Cotton Tufts to purchase the house we're standing in front of right now. John Adams enjoyed a lot of peace and tranquility at this home as did Abigail. So he christened his home Peacefield. There were two rooms on the first floor, two rooms on the second, and three smaller bedrooms on the third floor and then a small kitchen in the back of the house. So essentially there were about seven and a half rooms to this home.

This was John and Abigail's home base.

Before becoming first lady, Abigail would spend nine years in this house. The first year, she essentially was setting up the house after just returning from Europe. She had remembered this house as one of the grand houses in Quincy. But her perception of grand had changed since living in Europe. She began though right away making plans to enlarge the house. She wanted to improve on

the size and the height of the ceilings and the size of the space. She would in fact, write to her daughter warning her not to wear any of her large feathered hats because the ceilings were too low.

So Abigail began working with an architect to enlarge the size of the home, in effect doubling the size. Adding a long hall and a long entertainment room where she would receive her guests. With sensitivity to the architecture on the outside and the flow of the home, she had the builder dig down so that they could lower the floors and get the high ceilings that she desired without disrupting the architecture on the outside of the house. You step down two steps and you're in a whole different world.

A typical day for Abigail would be to rise at 5:00 a.m. She had many chores to do, much of her time here was spent tending the farm, taking care of the orchard and taking care of the house. But she also loved those early morning hours to spend by herself, preparing herself for the day but most importantly having a chance to indulge in one of her novels.

Although this is a presidential home, it is the home of a family. And Abigail instead of having servants doing all the work for her, even as a first lady she would also be contributing to the kitchen and the running of the household. This is something that she continued throughout her life no matter what her position was. She was very involved. She had children and grandchildren visiting her here and it was a very active and lively household.

She also spent a great deal of her time writing because again, their misfortune John and Abigail's in being apart was our fortune. In one letter when he's asking her to come to Philadelphia, Abigail would write of the room that she was in and the window and the view that she saw. The beauty which unfolds outside of the window at which I know right tempts me to forget the past. An indication that while Abigail was back here at Peacefield, she was on a new beginning as a first lady of the United States as the wife of the president and also still a mother. She would describe life here at Peacefield so romantically that John Adams would reply in one of his letters, "Oh my Sweet little farm, what I would do to enjoy thee without interruption?"

Susan Swain: And of the four years of the Adams presidency, how much time did Abigail spent at Peacfield versus in the capital?

Edith Gelles: She became ill in 1798 and went home and had to stay there for an extended time. And John actually followed her and he stayed there. For too long according to his cabinet members who've finally urge him to come back to Philadelphia which was then the capital.

But – so she tried to stay there for as much time as she could but again, her health caused her to be at home and she was quite ill for close to a year and possibly close to death during that time.

Susan Swain: Well, how did he serve as chief executive from afar?

Jim Taylor: Well, this also happened during the vice-presidency. When Congress was in meeting, the vice president would go back to wherever he lived. And I think that the president – when especially during the summer, they would usually leave in a spring and come back in the fall. It was like a seasonal thing. Although, he did overdo it a little bit during this time. So it was not unusual for the president to be away at that time.

Susan Swain: These were very trying and tempestuous years for a brand new nation. Can you give us a sense of some of the history of the period – I'll ask both of you, of what was happening during the Adams Administration, the key policy issues and how it was faring in the world to stage, this new country?

Jim Taylor: Well, I think the major problems were international at that time. There are internal political rifts and you have during this time really the creation of political parties in America, the two party system. But we had problems with the French, we had problems with the British and we had

particular problems with the French. American political parties were divided pro-French, pro-British. And one of the things that John was troubled with during this time was keeping the country out of war. And he was successful and I think that's probably the thing that he should be most recognized for during the period.

Edith Gelles: And I also find it ironic that he is one president who kept us out of war, avoided war because the Revolution could've -- and the United States would've collapsed in a second war with Britain …

Jim Taylor: But the people would've gone to war in draft ahead of that time.

Edith Gelles: They would have. They were ready to go to war and he prevented it. And it also subverted to do his career.

Susan Swain: In what way?

Edith Gelles: I mean, because the politicians at that time were like politicians forever, enjoying the exercise of making war. And they were very close to war. And the population, in general, was outraged by the piracy that was going on. American ships were being taken on the seas and American diplomats were being badly treated in France especially. The French Revolution had happened. John Adams, as Jim says, kept us out of war.

Susan Swain: We have a few key dates and a very, very historic four years of the Adams Administration, 1797 to 1801. And a small point for those of you who don't follow early American history, presidents then were inaugurated in March, now the date in January familiar to us now but March to March was the timeframe. And you can see things such as the Washington D.C. selected as the capital in 1800, 1801, Chief Justice John Marshall selected.

But I want to go to this date in 1798 with the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts. What were they and what is the significance and what is the viewpoint of both Adamses on this act?

Jim Taylor: Oh, the Alien and Sedition Acts were a reaction to some of the international problems at that time. There was a belief on the part of some people that we were about to be overrun by French revolutionaries and that they were influencing people in America. There were rumors about that cities were going to be burned and that there – it was terrorism that they were anticipating.

Susan Swain: So Americans were afraid of the French at that point?

Jim Taylor: Some of the French, they were people who were – for example, the Opposition Party, the Democratic-Republican Party was very enthusiastic about the French and some of the ideals of the French Revolution.

Susan Swain: Jefferson in particular.

Jim Taylor: Jefferson in particular. This is where they begin to go different directions. Also, some of the press was very, very vehement in their criticisms of the administration. So one of the thing is that they muzzled the press and I think this is the thing probably that John Adams is most criticized for.

Abigail, I believe supported John. Well, actually, it wasn't John that started to came on the Congress and he signed that, the legislation. But Abigail was even more vehement. This is where I say she's even more conservative than John is during that time.

Susan Swain: And the upshot of this for people who would be breaking the law, if you were caught of breaking the Alien and Sedition Acts, what happened?

Jim Taylor: You could be jailed.

Edith Gelles: Right.

Jim Taylor: You'd be jailed.

Edith Gelles: To recall Page Smith who was mentioned earlier, he's a biographer.

Susan Swain: Right.

Edith Gelles: Page Smith said that the press – wrote that the press at this time was most scurrilous in American history. They made things up. They didn't have standards. So that the press was – it was not only that they were supporting the French. They made up stories that were not true. And the Adamses were seriously worried about this. And also it should be said that Jefferson also supported the Alien and Sedition Acts except that he believed the states should be passing Sedition laws. Not the national government because he was in favor of states rights and that was part of what separated them.

So, it was not – it was something that at that time people didn't have the same horror about suppressing the press that we have today.

Jim Taylor: Right. And it was in the heat of a moment. It was in the heat of a moment.

Edith Gelles: Right.

Susan Swain: Next question comes from Steven (ph) watching us in Chicago. Hi Steven (ph).

Steven (ph): Hi there. I'm a – I was just wondering, you know, they say history repeats itself. And I was wondering if there are any presidents and first lady, first couple that most resemble or are analogous of the Adams's. You know, people talk about George and Barbara Bush because of the one-term presidency and the son that went on to be president. But is there a better relationship or is that sort of the relationship standard?

Jim Taylor: I hope you'll take that question.

Edith Gelles: Yes, there's no one else like Abigail and John. First of all, we don't have the insights into anyone else's lives. They don't leave us letters telling us. I think whose letters recently were revealed? Lyndon Johnson's love letters to Lady Bird were recently published.

Susan Swain: And Bess Truman and Harry Truman wrote letters to each other.

Edith Gelles: Yes. Right. But there's nothing like the Abigail and John exchange in American history.

Susan Swain: Not that the two of you are biased having spent your …

Edith Gelles: No we're not biased.

Susan Swain: Really? Is that right?

Edith Gelles: It's true.

Jim Taylor: No, and I think that the length of – it's when they were situated in such an important period of time and they were players on so many stages and that's the thing that sets them apart.

Susan Swain: Here's the question about Peacefield from Twitter. Many presidents, Aaron Chihi (ph) writes, use their homes as neutral space for meetings. Did John and Abigail host dignitaries at Peacefield?

Jim Taylor: People came by, I know that, but not so much during the presidency, much later at in retirement. Remember, there's when John is really quite ancient and I think it's a little while after Abigail has passed. Cadets from West Point came and they were – they had a band and they played and marched and they were served punch and the officers, John Adams gave a talk to the – a patriotic talk to the – for the troops.

Edith Gelles: Right.

Jim Taylor: And occasionally people would come by but they didn't entertain in the sense of politically entertaining. They too – it was family for the most part.

Susan Swain: And which is a contrast from Mount Vernon and the Washingtons which seem to be constantly welcoming people into their house throughout their …

Edith Gelles: Well, I think they did that. I think there was a lot of traffic through their houses.

Jim Taylor: Right.

Edith Gelles: People wanted to be close to the president and they were accessible. I think social standards were different then and standards of hospitality were different. So that if someone came to your door, you just didn't turn them away, although they might like to have done so.

Susan Swain: So during the period of the White House years, she continued to write letters as in the time they were separated?

Jim Taylor: Oh, right. Yes, she did. And when this – I think another important point is that when she is with John, it isn't that she isn't writing letters, she's writing letters to other people. While he is president, two of their children are in Europe as – yes, on a diplomatic mission. So there's a lot of letters back and forth between Thomas Boylston and John Quincy Adams to their parents especially to Abigail. And she writes to her sister. She writes wonderful letters to her sisters who were back in Massachusetts or a while in New Hampshire.

Susan Swain: We have another example of letter to John Adams from Abigail. Let's watch.

Female: "I have been much diverted with a little occurrence which took place a few days since and which served to show how little founded in nature the so much boasted principle of liberty and equality is. Neighbor Faxon (ph) came in one Evening and requested to speak to me. His errant was to inform me that if James went to School, it would break up the school for the other lads refused to go. Pray Mr. Faxon (ph) has the boy misbehaved? If he has let the Master turn him out of school. Oh no, there was no complaint of that kind, but they did not choose to go to school with a black boy. And why not object to going to meeting, because he does Mr. Faxon (ph)." She continues on in this vein saying, you know, they allow him to play at the dance and they still go.

And she closes this section saying, "The boy is a freeman as much as any of the young men, and merely because his face is black, is he to be denied instruction? How is he to be qualified to procure a livelihood? Is this the Christian principle of doing to others, as we would have others do to us?"

Susan Swain: This is a letter to John Adams as he's serving in the presidency. She's not just recounting an experience in her life. She's hoping to influence his thinking it seems. So, how concerned was he with rights and equality at this point in his presidency?

Jim Taylor: I think it's a little different thing. And I think this is James that she's talking about who was an Adams' servant. James was a special person to Abigail. And when Abigail, in few months after this goes to Philadelphia, John says, "Don't bring James." He didn't want blacks in Philadelphia as his servants. It's not really clear why but I think it was a sense that they could be corrupted because

there were much many fewer blacks in Massachusetts and it was a larger black – free black community and slaves in Philadelphia. And he says to her, "Don't have him come beyond Philadelphia or beyond New York. Have him go back." And he writes a second letter, and this is very revealing to me and he says, "You have babied him." And I think he was a special. I think she taught him to read.

And so, I don't think that this – I don't know that she was instructing John Adams so much on this is that she was showing her love and affection for James as an individual regardless of his race.

Susan Swain: Here's a quote that one of our viewers are sending I believe, it looks like she's quoting John – a letter of John to Abigail in 1774. The quote is fewer picked out was, "We live, my dear soul, in an age of trial. What will the consequence be, I know not." Do you have any thoughts on that?

Edith Gelles: Well, it's a wonderful quote because it does tell us that they had no idea that there would be war. Although, I guess they suspected there would be a war. They did not know its duration. They did not know it would separate the colonies from the mother country. All of the things that we take for granted that we know about them, we have to erase if we go back to a letter like this and view it from their point of view. He was saying, "We don't know what's going to happen."

Susan Swain: Few more things from this time period of the presidency, we said at the outset that she was criticized by the press who at sometimes used the phrase to describe her as Mrs. President. What's the whole context of that reference?

Edith Gelles: The context is the scurrilous press at that time, for one thing and that they attacked a woman was not very nice. And the British press did the same, referred to them as Darby and Joan and had attacked them because he was of course the American minister to Great Britain.

So she was accustomed to not having good relations with the press, but it didn't endear the press to her. And it speaks to the tone of newspaper journalism at that time.

Susan Swain: Did she complain to family members about this? Was she hurt by the way she was treated in the press or just take it as part of politics?

Jim Taylor: I think she probably took it as part of politics. I think she was much more defensive about her husband.

Edith Gelles: Right.

Jim Taylor: Abigail didn't have great ambition for herself but she had great ambition for John, she had great ambition for her boys but particularly for John Quincy Adams and she was very defensive of them. So, I think this is one of the reasons why the relationship with Jefferson is so difficult because she had really loved Thomas Jefferson as a friend and Jefferson she believed turned on her husband.

Susan Swain: How did she express her support of her husband in addition to just writing letters to him and encouraging him along?

Edith Gelles: She stayed there. She went there. And she was with him all of the time. When he needed her, she was there.

Susan Swain: Was there an avenue for her to respond to the press?

Edith Gelles: Not that I can think of. But her avenue of responding to the press was, oh, she was in favor of the Sedition laws. She liked the idea of curtailing the press.

Susan Swain: Let's take our next telephone call. It is from Allen (ph) Boca Raton, Florida. Hi.

Allen (ph). Yes. Hi. Good program. Thank you for taking my call. Interestingly enough, I'm a member of the press and we've heard two callers tonight kind of insinuate that Abigail was not a good mother because of a situation with Charlie yet they talk nothing about John Quincy, not only becoming present. I believe John Quincy was a leading abolitionist and here we are just follow American history whether it's the KKK still doing their thing in the South today, whether it's the John Birch Society, whether it's the Tea Party now which is 97 percent Caucasian, can we at least give Abigail throw her a bouquet of roses to say that may be she might have influenced John Quincy in terms of the color of a man's skin should not determine how we place them in this society and now you got scumbags like …

Susan Swain: All right. We're going to stop you right there but her influence on raising John Quincy Adams.

Edith Gelles: Well, John Quincy lived with her until he was 11 years old in which point he went to Europe with John. And she didn't see him again until he was 17 or 18. So he became a man and …

Susan Swain: Under the tutelage of his father.

Edith Gelles: Under the tutelage of his father. But she was very influential in those first 11 years. I balk at this tendency blame the mother every time something goes wrong with the children. Circumstances happen. There are genes. I mean, there is possibly a genetic predisposition to alcoholism in that family. Abigail's brother died of it and there apparently were other members of the family. And it's certainly was in the culture and the kind of sensitivity to alcohol.

So a revolution happened when her children grew up. They grew up in wartime. That can be very, very damaging to children's psyches.

Susan Swain: The year 1800 was a very, very difficult year for the Adamses. A campaign for re-election hard fought against the big political rival in Thomas Jefferson they lost that. There was also a year that they moved to the White House and they also lost their son in that year. So, let's talk about all of those individually for a little bit.

First of all, the decision to run for the office again. Did Abigail support John's interest in continuing in the presidency?

Jim Taylor: Yes. We don't have as much as we had in the decision for the previous election where they agonized over it. They went back and forth and there's letters should I, shouldn't I, should I, shouldn't I. I don't have as much of that for the second term. This was – he was in a harness, things were going and part of it was because by this time the political parties were so strong. He followed his – he just didn't want the other party in. He wanted to follow through with what he was doing. And he had and even though there were several bad things happening around or to the Adams family during that time is that actually in 1800 he had one of his great successes, the convention with the French that ended the non-declared war.

Edith Gelles: Right. Right. I also would emphasize that the political parties was not – were not written into the Constitution. And Washington and Adams both and many of the people around them did not anticipate political parties. They thought they had a constitution, they had a government. Well, everyone was going to agree and it would be harmonious. Didn't work out that way. But – and it was a surprise to them. I think it was a surprise to Adams that there was so much dissension during his administration.

Susan Swain: They lived the last four months of their administration as the first occupants of the White House. We have this graphic that we've shown of the White House in 1800 and it just really looks pretty miserable. What was life like in the Mansion for the Adamses?

Edith Gelles: Well, it was pretty miserable. They did not have heat. They had to put – gather wood such as it was in that area and stoke fires in the fireplaces. The Mansion was not finished when they moved in. Abigail describes Georgetown as a swamp. The city was not yet built. They moved in before there was a proper White House. I think – and it also I think affected the way she entertained, it affected her entire role as first lady and that she was limited by what she could do in that drafty, cold, incomplete house. They had one stairway that they could use to go to the second floor.

Susan Swain: But it must have been shared misery by the members of Congress who were arriving in the city with …

Jim Taylor: They are – most of them lived in rooming houses and boarding houses. And, of course another thing was it was seasonal. Congress came and went. There weren't a lot of people who lived year round in Washington at that time.

Susan Swain: And we have this graphic we've been showing of laundry being hung inside rooms of the White House. Is that apocryphal or that really happened?

Jim Taylor: I don't know.

Edith Gelles: I don't either. I suspect it's apocryphal.

Susan Swain: Yes.

Edith Gelles: And she may have done it. I don't know, right. It sounds like Abigail actually -- pragmatic solutions.

Jim Taylor: It wouldn't have been a good place to dry laundry though because it was dark and cold. Yes.

Susan Swain: And we've talked about Charles dying. Anymore to say about how that affected her and anymore for people to know about the death of that son in that turbulent year of 1800 for that?

Edith Gelles: Oh, it's a terrible heartache for her and for him.

Jim Taylor: He denied it though. He tried to stand off from it.

Edith Gelles: Right. Right. He did write it to Jefferson in later years, "The greatest grief of my life."

Susan Swain: Jen (ph) is watching us Boise. You're on the air Jen (ph).

Jen (ph): Oh, hi. Thank you for putting on this series. I'm curious about what role religion played in her life given that her father was a pastor. My sense was that John was raised with more Calvinist bent, but was more Unitarian as an older man. What about Abigail?

Edith Gelles: Thank you, thank you for that question. Abigail was a very religious woman. Abigail was so religious that in times of turbulence, when things went wrong in her life, she thought it was a case of punishment. When there was an epidemic during the war years when John was away when they – that people were dying and her servants were sick and so forth. She said, it is a scourge sent upon us for some sin. And she truly believed that life was providential. Her letters continually reference the Bible.

I think that when things got bad in her life, she became more religious. And when – and more conservatively religious. I agree with you that she was probably more conservative in her religion than John Adams.

Susan Swain: We've got 10 minutes left in our discussion of Abigail Adams in this series on the biographies of the first ladies with our two guests here. When John Adams realized that he'd lost the presidency, how did he take that? How did Abigail take it?

Jim Taylor: I think they were – well, by the time the electoral vote was counted, I think they pretty well knew that he was not going to be re-elected. I think they were disappointed. One of the things that John said throughout his public life was that he was always going to retire, he was always going to go back to the farm and retire. So, the – and he loved the farm. So in that sense, it wasn't so bad. But I think it was the defeat of the ideas and some people referred to as a revolution of 1800 because it was such a dramatic change with the other party coming in.

He did not attend the inauguration and that some people say it was because he's being spiteful or whatever. Those of us who defend Adams say he had to catch an early stage to get back. I don't know. It might be somewhere in between there. But part of it was a man who in a sense I think he felt betrayed him and defeated him and I think that was probably the hardest thing.

Edith Gelles: That's right. That's right.

Susan Swain: Now, this couple who had spent so many years apart and the development of their country and now had this opportunity to live together. How long did they live together in the post-White House years?

Edith Gelles: Well, Abigail lived until 1818 and they lived together for 18 years.

Susan Swain: And what were those years like for them?

Edith Gelles: They were idyllic in some ways and very difficult in other ways. It was not an easy retirement all the time. They were very happy to be together. Abigail refused to go visit her daughter for instance because she said, "I can't leave John. I'm not going to leave John." And during that period of time her daughter had a mastectomy in 1811 without anesthesia.

Susan Swain: That's so hard to think of. And then ultimately died.

Edith Gelles: And ultimately died two years later, but came from New York state to her parents' home to die. So they were very close. So, it was a time of satisfaction and peace and also very great disruptions in their lives. I mean, they had problems with grandchildren and children, I mean, there was constant drama going on. One grandson went off and fought in a revolution in Venezuela and they had to bail him out or not bail him out. John refused to bail him out, was that right?

Jim Taylor: And also they had some financial difficulties for a while.

Edith Gelles: Oh, yes.

Jim Taylor: There was a bank failure…

Edith Gelles: Yes.

Jim Taylor: … in England that their son had invested in and …

Susan Swain: This is where it does begin to sound like "Downton Abbey."

Jim Taylor: Yes.

Susan Swain: The large family with the trauma.

Jim Taylor: And one of the problems with the daughter was that she had a terrible husband. And they very early on realized that and they were constantly worried about her. Not just physically but just everything about her life.

Edith Gelles: Right.

Susan Swain: From the perspective of your life's work and the letters they were together so obviously they stopped writing letters at that point?

Jim Taylor: They stopped writing letters to each other, but she's still writing to other people and John is still writing to other people.

Susan Swain: To whom most prolifically?

Jim Taylor: They're writing to – well, John Quincy Adams is frequently away on diplomatic assignments or later will be Secretary of State. And he's in Washington -- a senator and other things. She has a sister – Abigail has a sister who lives in New Hampshire at that time. Her – I think Mary Cranch is her favorite sister, her older sister, lives fairly nearby so there aren't – there isn't much correspondence there. But to children, to friends …

Edith Gelles: Close to her granddaughter Caroline.

Jim Taylor: Oh, right. Right. Her grandchildren, right.

Edith Gelles: And so there is lovely correspondence between her and this young girl.

Susan Swain: When John Quincy goes to England, he meets his wife, Louisa Catherine there. What was the relationship between the two Adams women?

Edith Gelles: Well, I think it was a good one. I think Louisa Catherine was quite shocked by the culture she encountered in New England after having had a rather gentile upbringing in England and in France and was quite shocked by the people in the surroundings and the customs, even church attendance she …

Jim Taylor: When she went to the old house, she said it was like going on Noah's ark.

Edith Gelles: Right.

Susan Swain: Well, let's actually have our closing video, "A Return to Peacefield" where the Adams spent their final years.

Susan Swain: Abigail enjoyed 17 years of retirement here at Peacefield with her husband John Adams. Here, the old couple could dote on their children and grandchildren and enjoy the peace and tranquility that this place offered them throughout their lives. The president's bedroom is a reflection of the warmth that this house provided them. It was inviting, sunny and bright. And Abigail enjoyed many hours in this room writing to her friends, writing to her family, enjoying the time with her husband.

On October 27th of 1818, Abigail passed away from typhoid fever. She was 74 years old and John Adams had lost his dearest friend. The only way that he could find comfort was in the pen. He would pen a letter to Thomas Jefferson, letting Jefferson know that he lost his dear friend. And he would say to his family, "If only I could lie down beside her and die too."

Susan Swain: Can you talk about John Adams' life in the years after Abigail died?

Edith Gelles: Yes. John was surrounded by family, so he was not isolated. He had always as his amanuensis and hostess and caretaker, a niece who lived with him and had lived with him for most of their lives, her life. And grandchildren came and children came, so there was always traffic to the house and people came and the militia came from Boston, as you've said. So there was a lot going on during those years. And he was quite palsy. He couldn't write his own letters, so he had to have an amanuensis. He had someone write for him. But he carried on this incredible correspondence with Jefferson during those years. And it was …

Susan Swain: Culminating…

Edith Gelles: Yes.

Susan Swain: … as our viewers probably know with the two of them. These great bitter enemies finally coming to peace and dying together …

Edith Gelles: Right.

Susan Swain: … on the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence on July 4th which is really quite and amazing …

Edith Gelles: Yes.

Susan Swain: … piece of American history. There's a question here about whether or not there is a bloodline still living of John and Abigail? Or is there an Adams family still today?

Jim Taylor: We were joking about this before.

Edith Gelles: Oh, yes. We were laughing. Oh, yes. Why don't you respond to that?

Jim Taylor: There are several that the Massachusetts Historical Society and the Adams family have been close over the centuries. And there's an association, an Adams family association for the Adams Memorial Association. And I think they have more than 100 members. But what we were joking about is that we frequently get questions from people thinking, believing that they're related or a descendant of John and Abigail. Some of them may be, but there are many more descendants than think are possible.

Edith Gelles: Right. Right.

Jim Taylor: But people believed that …

Edith Gelles: Also the name gets lost because women of course marry out and so the Adams name gets lost.

Susan Swain: In our few minutes left, Stephanie (ph) from Farmington Hills, Michigan. You're going to be our last caller Stephanie (ph). What's your question?

Stephanie (ph): Thank you. I'm wondering what became of Nabby's children and after she died very young? Did they remain with the Adams at Peacefield? And thank you for taking my call. I've enjoyed the show.

Susan Swain: Thank you.

Edith Gelles: They were adults when she died. The daughter Caroline was married. I don't know she …

Jim Taylor: Caroline de Windt.

Edith Gelles: de Windt. Yes.

Jim Taylor: Yes. Yes.

Edith Gelles: She was married at that time. And the son was also an adult. So that – there were no small children.

Susan Swain: Our last video of Abigail's death at Peacefield. And if we – all right, we don't have that. So we have very little bit of time left. So, in bringing this full circle, for people who have been introduced to Abigail Adams tonight, what's the important thing to know about her? What was her impact or influence on American history?

Edith Gelles: She was influential and particularly as a – as we think back to the American Revolution, she is the only woman – her record of letters provides the only insights we have of the Revolution at a sustained level during that entire period of the Revolution and the early national period.

So she's historically significant. She also was an exemplary person and tells us about women's lives in that time and what it was like to be -- not just first lady or not just the wife of the American minister but to be a wife and a mother, and a sister, and a daughter.

Susan Swain: Dr. Taylor, what would you say?

Jim Taylor: I think the thing that I always think about with Abigail is the relationship, the partnership that with there's – without Abigail there's no John, without John there's no Abigail.

Susan Swain: And therefore, John's importance to history. So, the reason why she is important is the relationship?

Jim Taylor: Right. Right. Right. I – They would – Without the kind of support that she provided both to him in Europe, in the presidency, in the vice presidency the more important that he didn't have to worry. She was so trustworthy that she could take care of things, he could go off and be this great public person, which is exactly what she wanted.

Susan Swain: To our two guests, Edith Gelles and C. James Taylor, Jim Taylor, our thanks for helping us understand more about the life and legacy of America's Second First Lady, Abigail Adams. Thank you for your time.

Jim Taylor: Thank you.

Edith Gelles: Thank you.

Female: Next Monday on" First Ladies Influence & Image", how a young Quaker widow transformed into the woman that history remembers, Dolley Madison. She hosted afternoon parties for politicians on differing sides of the aisle to help the agenda of her husband, President James Madison. And although she was frightened as British troops made their way to burn the White House, she boldly saved the portrait of George Washington.

We'll take your phone calls, Facebook comments and tweets on Dolley Madison live next Monday at 9:00 p.m. Eastern on C-SPAN and C-SPAN 3 as well as C-SPAN Radio and cspan.org.

And our website has more about the first ladies including a special section, "Welcome to the White House" produced by our partner, The White House Historical Association, which chronicles life in the executive mansion during the tenure of each of the first ladies. And with the association we're offering a special edition of the book, "First Ladies of the United States of America", presenting a

biography and portrait of each first lady, comments from noted historians, and thoughts from Michelle Obama on the role of first ladies throughout history. Now available for the discounted price of $12.95 plus shipping at cspan.org/products.