

Constitution

The backstory

Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814)



Mercy Otis was the thirteenth child of Colonel James Otis and Mary Allyne Otis, born on September 14, 1728. The Otis family lived in West Barnstable, Massachusetts. While Mercy had no formal education, she studied with her brothers who were preparing to go to Harvard. One of Mercy's brothers was noted patriot and lawyer James Otis.

James Warren and Mercy Otis were married and settled in Plymouth, Massachusetts. James was a politician, he was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, became the speaker of the house and then President of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress. Mercy was involved in her husband's political career. The Warren home became a hot spot for local politics and housed protests and strategy meetings for the Sons of Liberty. Mercy began to take on her own voice in politics and had strong views on liberty, democracy and independence for the American colonies. Her husband encouraged her in her writings and began calling her 'the scribbler.' She became James' chief correspondent and sounding board.

Mercy kept in close contact with a group of other politically minded women, like Abigail Adams, Martha Washington and Hannah Winthrop, as they shared their ideas and increased awareness of women's issues. She also became a political advisor for many well-known political figures, including Samuel Adams, John Hancock, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. John Adams was especially important to Mercy Otis Warren, he was her literary mentor. In a letter to James Warren, Adams wrote "Tell your wife that God Almighty has entrusted her with the Powers for the good of the World, which, in the cause of his Providence, he bestows on few of the human race. That instead of being a fault to use them, it would be criminal to neglect them."

Warren wrote anonymously leading up to and throughout the Revolutionary War. She is regarded as being one of the most influential writers of the Revolutionary War. Warren had a World War II Liberty Ship named after her, and was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in 2002.

If Mercy Otis Warren were alive today, do you think she would have anonymously published her letters? Why do you think she did so during the Revolutionary period?

Next Lesson April 10