

Samuel Adams

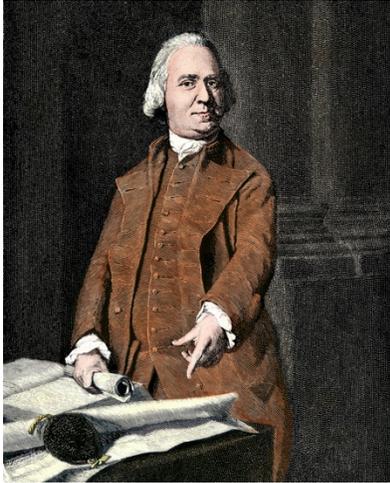


Figure 1: Samuel Adams.

(1722–1803). One of the firebrands of the American Revolution was Sam Adams. He helped to start it and he helped to keep it going—by speeches, newspaper articles, and behind-the-scene maneuvers. He combined great ideals with shrewd politics, and he worked hard to help America change from a British colony into an independent nation.

Samuel Adams was born on September 27, 1722, in Boston, Massachusetts. His father was a well-to-do brewer and active in politics himself. Samuel was one of 12 children. The boy attended Boston Grammar School, and in 1736 he entered Harvard College. He was graduated in 1740. Three years later he went back and studied for a Master of Arts degree. He was already thinking of revolution, for he chose as his thesis subject: “Whether it be lawful to resist the Supreme Magistrate, if the Commonwealth cannot otherwise be preserved.”

Adams had little inclination for the brewery business he inherited from his father and ran into debt. His first wife died, leaving behind two children. His second wife practiced strict economy and gratefully accepted food and clothing from her neighbors. Adams devoted himself to public affairs. As a member of the Caucus, a political group that met in an attic, he learned the arts of the politician.

Adams’s influence was due largely to his skill as a writer and to his passionate faith in the cause he served. In 1764 he was chosen to write Boston’s protest against England’s proposed Stamp Act. In 1765 he was elected to the Massachusetts colonial assembly and became the leader of opposition to the British government. In local politics he was called “the man of the town meeting.” He brought about the creation in Boston in 1772 of a “committee of correspondence” to rouse public opinion. Adams’s famous “circular letter” appealed to all the colonies to join in action against the crown. In 1773 Adams presided over the mass meeting that gave the signal for the Boston Tea Party.

As a delegate to the First and the Second Continental Congress, Adams fought for colonial independence. For his first trip to Philadelphia, one friend gave him money, and another outfitted him with clothes. About this time his friends also built him a new barn and repaired his house.

Adams signed the Declaration of Independence and, in 1788, secured the ratification of the U.S. Constitution by Massachusetts though he was at first opposed to the document. In 1794 he was elected governor of his state. He died on October 2, 1803.

Samuel Adams was related to the prominent Adams family. His grandfather was a brother of the grandfather of John Adams, second president of the United States.

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