

HISTORICAL RESTORATION



Getting the bugs out of the Abigail Adams birthplace in Weymouth has been a big part of restoring the landmark to its former glory



Portrait of a young Abigail Adams

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WEYMOUTH

The North Weymouth house where Abigail Adams spent her early years has seen its share of hardships over the past three centuries. It was moved twice, cut in half once and narrowly missed a date with a wrecking ball.

Now the house, at 180 Norton St., is recovering from its latest challenge – a leaking roof that served as a welcome mat for the powder-post beetles and termites that feasted on major support beams.

The damage was discovered during restoration. Most of it has been repaired, but it was significant, said Walter Beebe-Center, president of Essex Restoration, the firm doing the repair work.

“I think the roof leaked for a long time and it stayed wet,” he said during a recent tour of the house. “It’s dry now, so we’re safe from the bugs, but they had their way with the place and did some damage.”

Abigail Smith was born in the home in 1744 and lived there until she married future President John Adams in 1764. The wedding took place in the parlor of the home. The couple’s son, President John Quincy Adams, wrote in his diary of visiting his grandparents there.

An important historical figure in her own right, Abigail Adams was a vocal opponent of slavery and an advocate for equal education for boys and girls.

The house, normally open for tours during the summer, has been closed to the public for the last two years. A



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Abigail Adams Historical Society secretary Cathy Torrey and president Judy Alukonis look at damaged wood with carpenter Walter Beebe-Center.

\$148,500 renovation, paid for with Community Preservation Act money – a combination of a local property tax surcharge and state grants – has replaced the windows and sills, shored up the floors and, for the first time, added a heating and cooling system. Much of the labor was donated by local union workers.

Most of the siding has been replaced, but crews are still working on the rear wall, the site of the bulk of the water and bug damage.

The nonprofit Abigail Adams Historical Society owns the property and has been overseeing the repairs.

“By restoring the house with the integrity of the period, it will help us better show who she was and her influence on the world today,” said Cathy Torrey, a member of the society’s board of directors.

During a recent visit, the floor of the

home’s kitchen and parlor were littered with toolboxes, ladders and outdoor lights, and a power saw hummed outside the back door. The society hopes to re-open the house with period appropriate decor this spring.

The society is also working with an architect on a maintenance plan to avoid future problems, and it’s planning a stepped-up fundraising campaign to cover future work.

“This is, indeed, our major relic,” said Judy Alukonis, president of the society’s board of directors, referring to the house. When the renovation is completed, the house will have plenty of life left in it, Beebe-Center said.

“This building can stay here for centuries as long as it’s taken care of,” he said.

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Abigail Adams birthplace through the years

- **1685** – The Rev. Samuel Torrey of The First Church in Weymouth builds the house.
- **1738** – The Rev. William Smith purchases the home.
- **1744** – Abigail Smith is born in the house.
- **1764** – Abigail marries John Adams in the parlor of the home.
- **1826** – The First Church buys the house for its parsonage.
- **1838** – The house is deemed so dilapidated that church members vote to build a new parsonage on the same site. Nathaniel Ford buys the house and moves it intact to Route 3A

in Bicknell Square to house his workers.

■ **1942** – The federal government buys the Bicknell Square property that the house sits on for veterans’ housing, lays out plans to demolish the house.

■ **1947** – Residents form the Abigail Adams Historical Society, purchase a piece of land on Norton Street for \$1 and move the house there. The house is cut in half and moved in two pieces, then reconnected at the site.

Source: Abigail Adams Historical Society

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WEB EXTRA

See video of the renovation work at PatriotLedger.com/video



Artifacts from the second floor at the home in Weymouth have been preserved. At left, preservation carpenter Jon Folsom is working on new trim for the fascia boards on the home’s exterior.