



Saint Louis Mercantile Library  
Special Collections - Letters  
M-001 – Quincy, John Adams

## **Extended History of Collection M-001: Quincy, John Adams**

*Special Thanks to Roman Beuc, Library Docent, for researching and compiling this document*

John Quincy Adams was born in 1767, to John Adams and his wife Abigail Adams (nee Smith) in Braintree, Massachusetts. He did not attend school, but was tutored by his cousin, James Thax, and his father's law clerk, Nathan Rice. In 1779, Adams began a diary that he kept until just before he died in 1848. The fifty volumes are one of the most extensive collections of first-hand information from the period of the early republic.

Much of Adams' youth was spent accompanying his father overseas. John Adams served as an American envoy to France from 1778 until 1779 and to the Netherlands from 1780 until 1782. For nearly three years, beginning at the age of 14, John Quincy accompanied Francis Dana as a secretary on a mission to Saint Petersburg, Russia, to obtain recognition of the new United States. He spent time in Finland, Sweden, and Denmark and, in 1804, published a travel report on the Prussian province of Silesia.

After leaving the Presidency, Adams held office as a representative in the US House of Representatives from 1831 to 1848. It is during this period (1843) that this letter was written. It is in response to a request by the Baltimore Mechanical Library Association for Adams to give a lecture at their facility.

Baltimore Mechanical Library Association - A literature search located this organization in an 1870 catalog of libraries in the US. Rather than being an organization involved in the study of science and engineering, the Mechanical Library Association seems to have been an outgrowth of the Baltimore volunteer firemen's organization. By the later 18th C and into the 19th many volunteer Fire Companies had been formed throughout the city of Baltimore for the cities' protection. Besides serving in their fire protection function these organizations;

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*“were, in a sense, the club houses of the first half of the (19th) century. The most prominent citizens affiliated with the Fire Companies, and it was in the engine house that much of the town talk was heard ..... When the volunteer service was displaced by the Baltimore City Fire Department, a number of old companies had libraries for the use of members and maintained library associations which in some cases were kept up after dissolution of the old department. Sharf in commenting upon the Mechanical (Fire) Company wrote “With a view of exciting and fostering among its members a desire for mental cultivation and improvement, certain members of the Mechanical Fire Company, in 1840, formed themselves into an association for the purpose of collecting a library of scientific books, and of holding stated meetings for the hearing of lectures and essays. On the 16th of March (1840) it was incorporated as “The Library Association of the Mechanical Fire Company, with the following incorporators: Hugh D. Evans, Thomas M. Locke, Folger Pope, Philip W. Lowry, ..... and Israel Cohen”*

It is believed that this is the organization that Adams gives reference to in his response letter. This is forcefully confirmed by the inclusion of Philip W. Lowry, one of the addressees in Adam’s letter and also his being mentioned in one reference as one of the principal supporters of the Mechanical Library Association. No references could be found for G. Cohen or E. G. Dubois.

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