

# Michigan Law Review

---

Volume 49 | Issue 2

---

1950

## Bowen: JOHN ADAMS AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Michigan Law Review

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.law.umich.edu/mlr>



Part of the [Legal History Commons](#), and the [Legal Profession Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Michigan Law Review, *Bowen: JOHN ADAMS AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION*, 49 MICH. L. REV. 301 ().

Available at: <https://repository.law.umich.edu/mlr/vol49/iss2/25>

This Regular Feature is brought to you for free and open access by the Michigan Law Review at University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Michigan Law Review by an authorized editor of University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact [mlaw.repository@umich.edu](mailto:mlaw.repository@umich.edu).

JOHN ADAMS AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION. By *Catherine Drinker Bowen*.  
Boston: Little, Brown. 1950. Pp. xvii, 699. \$5.

The author of *Yankee From Olympus*, having breathed life into Justice Holmes, has surpassed herself to transmute the portly, conservative second President into a human, conscientious lawyer and constitutional architect. While the work has general appeal, it should also be of special interest to the lawyer and law student. For John Adams, particularly during this period of his life, was, in his own thinking as well as in that of his contemporaries, primarily a lawyer, with his political activities considered avocational. Yet in the cases which he defended, the trend towards revolution develops—the protest against confiscation of Hancock's sloop "Liberty" under the Townshend Acts, the defense of American seamen charged with killing a British officer in the course of impressment at

sea, and particularly his defense of the British soldiery responsible for the so-called Boston Massacre, the last two resulting in judgment for his clients. John Adams was primarily an independent advocate, and in the case of the British defendants he followed the unpopular course to serve what he considered truth. His reputation did not suffer for it. From the constitutional ideas which he developed in the course of these and other actions came his reputation as one of the leaders in separation from England in the First Continental Congress. But interwoven among these matters of constitutional significance one finds that problems of the bar, like other problems of history, tend to recur. In John Adams' concern over the content of his legal education, which was based largely on Coke's *Institutes*, we find reflected the feeling of the modern law student. In times long preceding the bar examination, the would-be lawyer still had to interview and secure the approval of the members of the local bar, being examined by them as to his capacity and worth. In the activities of the early Massachusetts bar to escape the reputation of the lawyer as "the devil's advocate" by eliminating the untrained pettifoggers capitalizing on the early New Englander's litigious nature are reflected the modern campaigns to preserve professional standards and ethics. Mrs. Bowen has succeeded in making what John Adams later called a "revolution in the minds and hearts of the people" a live and intensely human development. One could wish that the remainder of John Adams' life could be similarly treated.