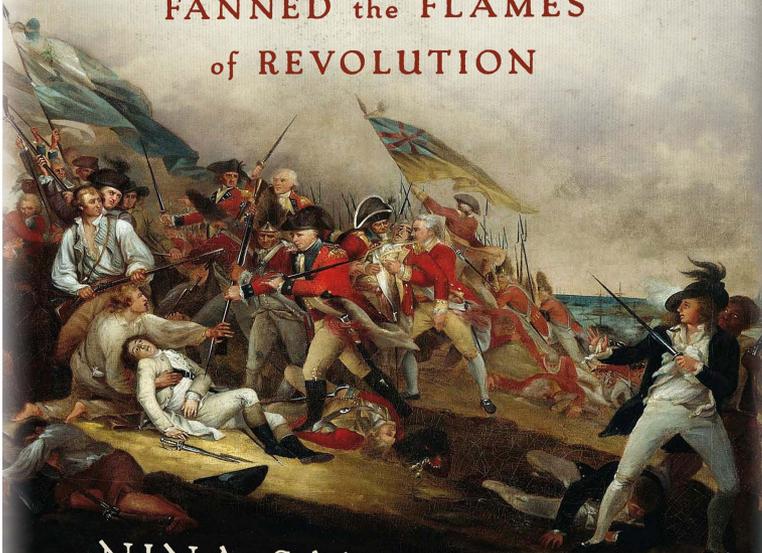


AMERICAN REBELS

HOW the HANCOCK,
ADAMS, and QUINCY FAMILIES
FANNED the FLAMES
of REVOLUTION



NINA SANKOVITCH

An Exclusive Preview of
American Rebels by Nina Sankovitch

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Prologue: A Village Mourns

*Every moment of our existence has some connection . . .
to an eternal succession of future ages. . . .*

—EDMUND QUINCY IV

In the spring of 1744, a congregation in the small village of Braintree, south of Boston in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, gathered to mourn the death of their minister, the Reverend John Hancock. Outside the church, the heavens opened up. Rain streamed down, drenching the wild bluebells that grew in the high meadows of Penn's Hill overlooking the sea, dripping from the apple trees planted in ordered lines behind the village's low houses, and running in widening rivulets between freshly plowed spring fields. Inside the church, its stone walls were streaked with black lines of damp and the windows steamed in the warmth rising off the gathered mourners.

Six years earlier, in 1738, Reverend Hancock gave the funeral sermon for Braintree villager Edmund Quincy III, who had died the year before while visiting England. There was no body to bury but much to mourn. In his sermon, Hancock lamented the many afflictions of the Quincy family, having endured a year of many family deaths, including the death of Edmund's wife, Dorothy Flynt Quincy. But not only had the family suffered from their losses, Reverend Hancock preached: the community as a whole had been wounded, for the strength of the whole derived from the contributions of each individual inhabitant.

What Reverend Hancock could not have known in 1738—and what no one in the church knew on the day of his funeral in 1744—was that from this village, Braintree, and this parish, the North Parish, would come the men and women who would shape the history of America. From the Quincy family, whose losses were so heavy in 1738; from the Adams family, whose patriarch served as deacon to the North Parish Church; and from Reverend

Hancock's own family would come the leaders of the next generation, the rebels who would foment a revolution.

The rebels were still children—or not yet even born—and their time to lead was still decades away. But their story—the shared story of John Hancock, Dolly Quincy, John Adams, Abigail Smith, and Josiah Quincy Jr.—began on that day in May 1744, when a community gathered to mourn their spiritual leader.

Reverend Hancock's son John was seven years old when his father died. On the day of the funeral, he sat in the same pew he had sat in every Sunday listening to his father preach. Beside him sat his mother, Mary Hawke Hancock, his sister, Mary, and his brother, Ebenezer.

“Braintree may this day be called Bochim, a place of Weepers,” began the Reverend Ebenezer Gay.¹ Gay was minister of the Old Ship Church in Hingham but had come to Braintree to preach the funeral sermon of his good friend, John Hancock. Reverend Gay looked out over the crowded church, every pew taken up and more people standing with their heads bowed. All the community had come together to mourn the too-short life of a very good man.

Reverend Hancock had loved his North Parish ministry, a small but solid community of Congregationalists settled by the bay. He'd been raised inland, in the town of Lexington, the oldest son of the man he'd been named for, and in whose footsteps he had at first followed. His father was a minister so powerful that he was called the Bishop of Lexington, a minister so persuasive that a brand-new meetinghouse had been built for him when he commanded it, its spire visible from the countryside all around.² And yet when the younger Reverend Hancock was ready to preach, he left Lexington and came to Braintree, eager for the sea and for a different style of preaching.

Like the lighthouse that stood on Brewster Island in the bay, John Hancock saw his calling as that of a beacon of light through the dark. While his fearsome father had given fire-and-brimstone sermons filled with prohibitions and punishments, he built his ministry based on hope and comfort. His sermons offered the promise of eternal salvation through faith, and happiness on earth through hard work and the building of community. In his daily life, he showed gratitude for what God had given him and kindness toward the villagers who had come to rely on him.

The North Parish congregation was reminded now by Reverend Gay of just how caring their minister had been: “How Sweet to us hath been his Conversation! How sound his Advice! How kind his Assistance! How tender his Sympathy with us in our Troubles!”³

Reverend Gay asked the parishioners, “Is the Untimely Death of a Man of God to be Deeply Lamented?” After all, John Hancock had been only forty-one years old when he died from his short illness. “Who can forbear to mourn the untimely Death of the Man of God, whose funeral we are now attending? Is there a Person that does not from the bottom of his Heart sigh out the Lamentation over him, *Alas my Brother? Or O my Father, my Father!*”⁴

Young John Hancock had passed the grave dug for his father that morning. Walking with his mother and siblings to the meetinghouse from the parsonage where they lived, he had seen the open rectangle of black, framed by neat mounds of wet grass and brown earth. There was no shelter from rain in this graveyard, nor from the hard winds that came off the coast less than a mile away. By the time the funeral service ended, the graveside piles of earth and grass would be diminished, pummeled down by the elements. But the hole would remain, waiting to be filled.

Although there is no complete record of who attended the funeral, it is likely that Reverend Hancock’s North Parish congregation turned out in full, despite the rain. Hancock knew them all personally, had baptized them, guided them, married them, and buried them for almost two decades. The minister recorded the dates of the ceremonies himself, as when he baptized his own son: “John Hancock, my son, January 16th, 1737.”⁵

Certainly, Deacon John Adams would have attended the funeral of his minister, along with his two older sons, John and Peter. His wife, Susanna, however, might have stayed home with little Elihu, not even three years old. Deacon Adams’ son John was a friend of young Hancock; he would later write that he had known John Hancock “from the cradle. . . . We were at the same school together, as soon as we were out of petticoats.”⁶

Together with the other boys of the village, young Adams and young Hancock often escaped into the hills surrounding the village; they would find a flat slab of granite where they sat watching the ships passing in and out of Boston to the north and pitched rocks and acorns down the hill, aiming for but never hitting the glittering waters of the bay.

Members of the extended Quincy family would also have attended the funeral, filling out entire rows of pews. Edmund Quincy IV (the oldest son of Edmund Quincy III, who had been eulogized by Reverend Hancock in 1738), along with his wife, Elizabeth Wendell Quincy, would have attended, although how many of their eight children would have come along is unknown. Josiah Quincy, brother of Edmund Quincy IV, working now in Boston much of the time, would have tried to attend; he considered Reverend

Hancock a friend, and his two sons, Edmund and Samuel, were playmates of young John Hancock. Josiah's wife, Hannah Sturgis Quincy, would not have been in church but was most likely home with their youngest, a baby boy named Josiah after his father.

Norton Quincy, a cousin to brothers Edmund and Josiah, wrote in a letter about being in church that day. He would have come to the funeral with his parents, with whom he lived, John Quincy and Elizabeth Norton Quincy. Norton's sister Elizabeth was there with her husband, the Reverend William Smith. Elizabeth and William Smith lived in Weymouth, the next town over, where Reverend Smith served as pastor of the First Church.

Reverends Gay, Hancock, and Smith had shared their pulpits with one another, preaching from town to town. Their purpose, as Reverend Hancock put it, was "to shine in these dark Places of the Earth . . . to sing of the Mercy, the distinguishing Mercy of the Lord, in planting, watering, increasing, and defending them."⁷

Reverend Smith might have wondered why he hadn't been asked to give the funeral sermon, given his friendship with John Hancock and his wife's connections to Braintree, but in the end, he'd taken it all in stride. Elizabeth was pregnant that spring, and their daughter Abigail would be born in the summer. As the granddaughter of a Quincy, she would have social status; even with all his spiritual fervor, Reverend Smith was glad for the potential benefits such status would confer.

Braintree, like most villages settled by emigrants from England in the seventeenth century, was not separated, geographically or socially, along rigid class lines. All members of the community shared the village green and patronized the same shops and tradesmen; they bought their beer from the same brewery, and the younger boys all attended the same Dames School led by Mrs. Belcher; most of the older ones attended the local Latin grammar school. Three parish churches provided spiritual nourishment and everyone imbibed.

And yet subtle divisions were acknowledged. The villagers considered the Quincy family to be their local gentry, with their vast landholdings, fine houses with imported furniture, large libraries, and cellars stocked with Madeira and other wines from Europe; their sons would not attend the local Latin school but instead were students at the more prestigious—and rigorous—Boston Latin School.

The Hancock family was revered in the village for their association with the church and respected for their education: both Bishop Hancock and his son had attended Harvard.

The Adams family and others like them were the solid yeomen of the village, craftsmen and farmers who worked with their hands, prayed dutifully, and drank hard cider but never wines from faraway lands.

Despite these subtle class lines, the Hancock, Quincy, and Adams families all lived close by each other, with just a mile or two separating them. Edmund and Josiah Quincy lived in the houses that had been owned by their father, Edmund Quincy III. The oldest of the houses had been built in 1635, and Josiah lived there during the early years of his marriage to Hannah Sturgis; both Edmund and Samuel were born in the old house. Edmund Quincy IV lived in the newer house, built in 1685 and located close to a wide brook that teemed with eels. Surrounding the two brothers' homes was a large estate of outbuildings, well-tended fields, ornamental gardens, and orchards with "fine fruit trees."⁸

From the Quincy estate, it was a short walk to the village green of North Braintree and the parsonage of Reverend Hancock. The Hancock home was a "Handsome Country seat . . . containing besides a very commodious well-finished house, a good Barn, Out-Houses, fine Gardens and the best of orchards."⁹ It was also dark and cold (John Hancock never forgot the frigid conditions of his father's parsonage during the long winter months) but its outlook was brightened in the spring by tall stands of lilac and clumps of yellow lilies.

A farther walk past the green and down the old Plymouth Road led to the Adams family farmhouse: from "both sides stretched away the wide fields of the farm . . . sprinkled with orchard trees and occasional pines and elms. The majestic sweep of the forest-covered slopes of Penn's Hill . . . and the more distant terraces of the Blue Hills bounded the vision."¹⁰

Up the hill that rose beyond the Adams property was the home of Norton Quincy and his parents, a tall and rambling house built high on Mount Wollaston, site of the original village settlement in 1625.

Living in such a close community, and regardless of class or status, the young people of the North Parish of Braintree felt connected to one another. They had been baptized together, schooled in the early years together, and raised together on the promises of their minister, the Reverend Hancock.

Now they, along with their parents and grandparents, mourned him. "It is the Death of a Prophet and of the Son of a Prophet, we are bewailing," preached Reverend Gay. "An able Minister of the New Testament taken away from us in the midst of his Days."¹¹ The stone-walled church of North Braintree echoed with sorrow.

Underneath the current of grief for the dead ran concern for the living. The parsonage would have to be vacated, another minister found, and a new place made for Mary Hancock and her children. It was assumed—and rightly so—that the old Reverend Hancock would invite his son’s diminished family to live with him in Lexington. Work would be found for the wife and daughter, and the boys would be educated as best the local schools could do. Friends would be separated and new lives begun.

But even as the fortunes of these children of Braintree diverged, their futures would bring them together again. A shared promise connected them, fostered by the history, the land, and the people of Braintree. It was instilled in their blood and bones; distilled from their parents’ lessons, the psalms they all knew by heart, and the books they read; nurtured by the fertile hills they roamed and the abundant wilderness that touched their tiny village; and strengthened by the cross-hatched, dependable order of the village itself, and the wide-open shoreline that could be seen from every promontory, with an expanse of blue leading all the way back to England.

The promise had been articulated in 1739 by Reverend Hancock, in a sermon in which he told his congregation that their “great Errand into this wilderness”—their “solemn covenant . . . of Liberty”—was grounded in the “good and early Foundation” laid by their forbears who first came to America from England.¹²

But it was not until his father’s death in 1744 that events were set in motion which would propel young John Hancock and his village companions to hold that promise as sacred and inviolate. The covenant of liberty that they shared would be sharpened by ambition and envy, polished through friendships and love, and fought for in a revolution fomented by these children of Braintree.

These American rebels.

I

Founding a Village

*Not such Another Place, for benefit or rest,
In all the universe can be possessed.*

—THOMAS MORTON

The first Quincy to arrive in America was named Edmund, a name that would go on to be shared through generations of Quincys. Edmund Quincy and his wife, Judith, arrived in Boston in 1633, traveling from England with the prominent Puritan minister Joseph Cotton. Because of his association with Reverend Cotton, Edmund was able to purchase title to over four hundred acres of very good land, fertile and ready for farming, south of Boston.

John Winthrop, the governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, oversaw the purchase himself. The land had recently been confiscated—Governor Winthrop would have said “saved”—from a blasphemer and troublemaker named Thomas Morton, and Winthrop was eager to have God-fearing settlers purify the lands Morton had desecrated.

Morton had arrived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony eight years earlier, in 1625, traveling from England with Richard Wollaston, captain of the ship *Unity*. Wollaston’s cargo was human, a large group of indentured servants whose contracts Wollaston hoped to sell to fishing companies operating out of Cape Ann and up the New England coast. Along with Morton and a fellow by the name of Fitcher,¹ after arriving in Boston Wollaston traveled south and set up a temporary camp on a low hill on the coast. The indigenous Massachusett tribe called the hill Passonagessit, meaning “little neck of land,” for the way it jutted out into the bay. Under the leadership of sachem Chickatawbut the Massachusetts had cleared most of the trees on the hill, leaving a fertile and open hilltop attractive for farming.

Captain Wollaston, however, wasn’t interested in farming. When he heard that there was a need for indentured workers at the plantations in Virginia, with prices paid even greater than those offered in New England, he

decided to try his luck farther south. He returned to his ship, leaving only a small group of indentured men behind in the settlement on the hill. Morton and Fitcher would guard over the indentured men until Wollaston returned, and then they too would be sold off to work in fledgling colonial industries.

Waiting for Wollaston to return, Thomas Morton found himself becoming enchanted by the landscape around Passonagessit: “The more I looked, the more I liked it. . . . in all the knowne world it [cannot] be paralel’d, for so many goodly groves of trees, dainty fine round rising hillocks, delicate faire large plaines, sweete cristall fountains, and cleare running streames that twine in fine meanders through the meadows, making so sweete a murmuring noise to hear.”²

He became so enchanted that he decided to settle for good on these low hills south of Boston. But first, he had to start his own rebellion. Through skillful argument (he had trained as a lawyer at Clifford Inns, London) and a generous gift of more than a few barrels of beer (he had ample funds through family ties), Morton convinced the men left behind by Wollaston to rebel against their indentured status and start life over as free agents in the New World. Fitcher was run off the hill of Passonagessit and Morton became the new leader of the small band of men. He named his community Mare-Mount, meaning “a hill providing views upon the sea.”³

Morton set up a robust trading post at Mare-Mount, inviting local Indians to trade goods, including highly lucrative furs, for guns and other supplies. As William Bradford, then governor of the Pilgrim colony at Plymouth, described it, Morton not only gave the Indians guns but he “taught them how to use them, to charge and discharge, and what proportion of powder to give the piece, according to the size and bigness of the same; and what shot to use for fowl and what for deer.”⁴

From his own account, Morton got on quite well with the locals and wanted to live in harmony with them: “these I found most full of humanity, and more friendly” than the English Pilgrims.⁵ He claimed that the purpose of the settlement at Mare-Mount was to create a community where the English settlers and the local Indians could live together, trade together, and prosper together. And the settlement did prosper, with brisk trade and plenty of furs acquired to send back to England.

But Governor Bradford and his band of Pilgrims saw a different purpose to Morton’s settlement: they condemned it as a den of vice and iniquity. As Bradford wrote later, the settlers at Mare-Mount “fell to great licenciousnes, and led a dissolute life, powering out themselves into all profanesses. And

Morton became a lord of misrule . . . quaffing and drinking, both wine and strong waters in great excess.”⁶

Outraged by reports of good times being had on the hilltop, the Pilgrims called Morton’s settlement not Mare-Mount but Merrymount, a name intended to indict Morton and all his followers; “for the same Reason that the common People in England will not call Gentlemen’s ornamented Grounds, *Gardens* but insist upon calling them *Pleasure Grounds*, i.e. to excite Envy and make them unpopular.”⁷

While Morton’s settlement continued to prosper, the Pilgrim trading posts floundered, and tensions between Morton and Bradford grew. The Pilgrims spread stories about Morton’s arms deals with Indian populations (while ignoring the same weapons trading that went on by other settlers) and also shared largely embellished accounts of the debauched revelries enjoyed at Mare-Mount.

Morton himself bragged of his May Day festivities, during which a “goodly pine tree of 80 foote longe” was raised in the middle of the settlement and decorated with pairs of buck antlers nailed to the top in a particularly heathen flourish; tables of food were set out, barrels of drinks provided, and “drinking and dancing” ensued.⁸ According to Morton, a good time was had by all.

But Governor Bradford put a sexual spin on the May Day merrymaking, alleging that Morton and his men invited “Indian women for their consorts, dancing and frisking together, like so many fairies, or furies rather, and [engaging in] worse practices.”⁹

The fact that Morton was aligned with the Church of England and opposed to the Pilgrims at Plymouth was another reason for discord between the two settlements; Morton saw himself as “a man that endeavored to advance the dignity of the Church of England,” while the Puritans were separatists who sought, as Morton put it, to “vilify” the Church of England.¹⁰ Morton called the somberly dressed and dour Pilgrims “moles” and disdained their frugal and joyless lifestyle.¹¹

Disturbed by the economic and religious threats posed by Morton (and the great fun he was having), in the early summer of 1628, the Pilgrim leaders sent Captain Miles Standish to “take Morton by force.”¹² “Captain Shrimp” (as Morton called Standish, who was very short) and his company “fell upon [Morton] as if they would have eaten him: some of them were so violent that they would have a slice with scabbert.”¹³

Standish arrested Morton and brought him back to Plymouth. Morton

was exiled for a brief period to a deserted island off the coast and then transported back to England in 1628.

Morton returned to Massachusetts a year later, intent on retaking his settlement on the hill. Finding a small but welcoming community still living there, as well as his glorious maypole still standing in the center of the village, he settled back into his Mare-Mount life. He resumed trading for furs but no longer dealt in arms or ammunition. He also invited the locals to live in his community, which they did, leading once again to rumors that Morton was engaging in sexual adventures proscribed by God.

Morton saw in his little community a model for living in the New World, a kind of utopia based on social integration with the native people, economic flexibility, and enjoyment of life with all its natural and manmade pleasures. But his “consorting” with Indians and having too good a time as a “Lord of misrule” rankled the Puritan authorities that were now coming to power in Massachusetts.¹⁴

In 1630 he was arrested again, this time under the orders of Governor Winthrop, Puritan leader of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Morton was put on a ship to be sent back to England, the famous maypole was finally cut down, and the homes of Mare-Mount were burned to the ground. The fires were timed to coincide with Morton’s departure by sea so that he could see the flames and smoke of his destroyed settlement from the ship.¹⁵

The hilltop at Mare-Mount was renamed Mount Wollaston and its lands were redistributed by Governor Winthrop, with the intent of returning the lands to placid, God-fearing settlers. Edmund Quincy was one of the lucky ones and, as a devout Congregationalist, received property on and around the low hill overlooking the bay. Fellow emigrants who received land grants on the hills of Passonagessit included the Coddingtons and the Hutchinsons, families with whom the Quincys quickly became friendly.

The peace and quiet sought by Governor Winthrop, by making land grants to emigrants of good reputation, was denied to him when the new settlers on the hill began to follow the radical teachings of one of their own. It was as if the hills themselves breathed rebellion into their inhabitants. Anne Hutchinson, married to William Hutchinson, arrived on the hill as an already strong and outspoken woman. While living in England she had questioned the practices of Puritan leaders there. But once she arrived in America, Hutchinson became even more critical of the ways in which Puritan dogma was interpreted by both local ministers and colonial leaders, including Governor Winthrop.

When a minister named John Wheelwright, who was married to her husband's sister, arrived in Mount Wollaston, Anne helped him to become pastor of the local church. Strongly influenced by Anne Hutchinson and her spiritual convictions, Wheelwright began to preach in a way that brought him many followers, including the Coddingtons and the Quincys. But his preaching, and her convictions, also caught the attention of elder ministers in the colony.

Anne Hutchinson believed the covenant of grace, a tenet of Congregationalism that holds that certain people are destined for eternal salvation from birth, was proven only through direct communication with God, which she herself enjoyed on a regular basis. Hutchinson told her followers that the directives she received from God were more important in guiding how she lived her life than the dictates of local ministers, who tended to couch their commands in terms of the covenant of works, which held that doing good in the community was a way of proving one's worthiness and eventual salvation. Hutchinson rejected teachings based on the covenant of works; she saw outward acts of goodness as irrelevant, given that only internal communication with God assured salvation.

While the Congregationalist clergy did believe that grace was necessary for salvation, it was impossible for them to discard the covenant of works. How else could they impel their flocks to behave morally, to follow town and church rules, to perform the needed work to make the settlements flourish and grow?

Grace could only get the Puritans so far; they needed hard work to succeed. Adherence to strict rules of behavior set by the church was vital to the success of the communities in New England, and Anne Hutchinson's teachings about resistance to church rules—and her arguments against the usefulness of good works in achieving salvation—threatened the stability of those communities.

In 1637, the General Court of Massachusetts brought charges against Anne Hutchinson for the heresy of antinomianism, meaning operating “outside the law” of the church. (Charges of sedition for preaching against conventional doctrine in his sermons were brought against the Reverend John Wheelwright.) The court, led by Governor Winthrop, demanded that Hutchinson recant her criticisms of the clergy of Massachusetts. Hutchinson refused to back down and threatened the members of the General Court and the entire community for prosecuting her: “if you go on in this course you begin, you will bring a curse upon you and your posterity, and the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”¹⁶

The court responded by banishing her from the colony; she was then excommunicated from the Puritan Congregational church. During her sentencing, she was “cast out” and delivered “up to Satan.”¹⁷ Reverend Wheelwright was also exiled; he left the colony for New Hampshire, where he founded the settlement of Exeter. Although he was an active supporter of Hutchinson and Wheelwright, William Coddington was not exiled; he chose to leave, however, following Anne Hutchinson and her family to Rhode Island. Once there, Coddington would play a prominent role in Rhode Island government, reaching the position of royal governor of the colony of Rhode Island in the 1670s.

After her husband died, in 1641, Anne Hutchinson left Rhode Island for New York, settling in a small community by Pelham Bay. In 1643, Anne and six of her children were massacred by local Native Americans. Her daughter, Susanna, was taken captive, and later ransomed back to Anne’s son Edward, who was still living in Boston.

Edmund Quincy died early in 1637 before he and his family could be drawn into the battles surrounding Anne Hutchinson; thus, he unwittingly protected his family from possibly being charged with heresy themselves and losing their position—and lands—in Mount Wollaston. Nevertheless, his wife, Judith, and their two children were left “in the wilderness” (as the family lore went), and Judith was compelled to sell the lands on Mount Wollaston to Captain William John Tyng, one of Boston’s wealthiest merchants.¹⁸ She moved down into the sandy lands along the coast, into a house that would stay in the Quincy family for generations.

The lands sold to Tyng eventually came back to the Quincy family through marriage.¹⁹ In the early 1700s, John Quincy (father of Norton Quincy and uncle to Edmund Quincy IV and Josiah Quincy) built a mansion on the hill where Thomas Morton had held his wild parties, not far from where Anne Hutchinson had lived with her family.

The selectmen of the village changed the name of their settlement from Mount Wollaston to Braintree in 1640, perhaps because of the controversies associated with the previous name. The name of Braintree was chosen from a well-favored town in England. But both the mansion built by John Quincy and the hilltop on which it stood would forever be known as Mount Wollaston.

Even with the change of name, the village of Braintree continued to foster a rebellious spirit in its citizens. The villagers of the eighteenth century would prove to be as fiercely independent in their political and religious

convictions as both Morton and Hutchinson. But the Christianity they practiced would not have been sanctioned by the Congregationalism of their forefathers nor acceptable to the even more exacting Anne Hutchinson.

By the time Reverend John Hancock became minister of the Third Parish Church of Braintree in 1726, the families of the village, including the Adamses and the Quincys, no longer relied on predestination but instead demanded that each community member work hard to achieve satisfaction on earth and salvation in heaven.

They were still deeply religious and loyal to their local church, and they still followed many behavioral strictures of the Puritan church, including prohibitions against working on the Sabbath, playacting, dancing, or celebrating Christmas or Easter (and certainly no drunken celebrations around a huge maypole). What had changed was how they defined their own worth and their role in the world.

The people of Braintree believed not only in their individual abilities but also in their collective duty to determine their own fates and the shared future of their village. As Reverend Hancock preached, the “solemn covenant . . . of Liberty” was not obtained through faith alone but could only be realized through hard work performed by a community together.²⁰ And this sacred covenant would be protected against any and all usurpers who attempted to take their liberty away.