

social sciences

BIOGRAPHY

Jacobs, Diane. *Dear Abigail: The Intimate Lives and Revolutionary Ideas of Abigail Adams and Her Two Remarkable Sisters*. Ballantine. Feb. 2014. 512p. illus. notes. bibliog. index. ISBN 9780345465061. \$28; ebk. ISBN 9780345498466.

Among the many biographies—and collections of the letters—of Abigail Smith Adams, this one by Jacobs (*Her Own Woman: The Life of Mary Wollstonecraft*) uniquely focuses on the interconnectedness of Adams with her sisters, Mary Smith Cranch and Elizabeth “Betsy” Smith Shaw Peabody. Jacobs bases her study on their lifelong correspondence. They shared private thoughts on everything from courtship, marriage, and child rearing to philosophical, economic, and political issues. Jacobs makes evident the intense familial bond they had with one another, their spouses,

and their children. This book will be valued by all its readers. It will be of particular interest to devotees of women’s studies and early American history.—Margaret Kappanadze, Elmira Coll. Lib., NY

Spiel, Hilde. *Fanny von Arnstein: Daughter of the Enlightenment*. New Vessel. 2013. 371p. tr. from German by Christine Shuttleworth. bibliog. index. ISBN 9781939931030. pap. \$18.99. ebk.

The noted Austrian author Spiel’s 1962 biography is now translated by her daughter into English. Spiel clearly saw von Arnstein as a kindred spirit as Michael Z. Wise’s introduction makes clear. This is an important book, capturing the life and times of a Jewish baroness (1758–1818) who was at one time called “the most interesting woman in Europe.” The privileged daughter of the Master of the Royal Mint in Berlin, Franziska (Fanny) Itzig married

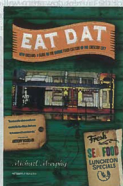
both French and German, with painstaking political and historical context provided. **VERDICT** This work is recommended for sophisticated readers interested in Jewish history and comfortable navigating the complexities of European politics during the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras.—Marie M. Mullaney, Caldwell Coll., NJ

Swift, Will. *Pat and Dick: The Nixons, an Intimate Portrait of a Marriage*. Threshold Editions. 2014. 336p. photos. notes. index. ISBN 9781451676945. \$26.99; ebk. ISBN 9781451676969.

Swift’s book begs the question: Could Richard M. Nixon have become president if not for his wife, Pat? Relying on newly released materials housed at the Nixon Presidential Library, including the couple’s earliest correspondence and other of Pat’s archives there, Swift (*The Kennedys Amidst the Gathering Storm*), a psychologist, begins with the Nixons’ courtship, when the Quaker lawyer Richard, unrelenting in his attentions, convinced his independent and beautiful girlfriend to marry him, making what was arguably the most astute decision of his life. As he progressed in politics, so, too, did Pat sustain him and seek to create an enviably happy homelife to present to the media to overcome the impression that the two were cold and distant. An introverted, deeply insecure man by nature, Richard evidently found that the steadfast and loyal presence of his wife made it possible for him to further his political ambitions, until the time when his native insecurity took him a step too far. Swift covers the aftermath of Watergate as experienced by the Nixons and their daughters, through the death of Pat in 1993, followed closely by the end of her husband’s life in 1994. Overall, he gives us among the most nuanced portraits of these two complex individuals that we have yet seen. **VERDICT** For all biography buffs, presidential history buffs, and those who study profiles of marriage.—Lisa Guldarini, Algonquin P.E. IL

Whitelock, Anna. *The Queen’s Bed: An Intimate History of Elizabeth’s Court*. Sarah Crichton: Farrar. Feb. 2014. 480p. illus. notes. bibliog. index. ISBN 9780374239787. \$28. ebk.

Whitelock (public history, Royal Holloway, Univ. of London); *Mary Tudor: Princess, Bastard, Queen* follows her previous work



Trains around the world, the Nixons’ marriage, feasting in New Orleans

and children as they endured grave illness, isolation, financial hardship, and the frustration of being thinking women in a man’s world where intelligent, educated women were discouraged from engaging in substantive communication on nondomestic issues. Letter writing for these self-sacrificing and resilient sisters offered opportunities for sharing family news but also provided an essential forum with like-minded, trusted, supportive females, allowing them a brief respite from mundane yet stressful domesticity. Jacobs uses the sisters’ letters to show the women circumventing cultural restrictions in order to assert their influence within and beyond their domestic spheres. **VERDICT** This sympathetic and engaging treatment of Abigail Adams and her close-knit fam-

a financier to the Austro-Hungarian court, becoming a Viennese salonnière during a critical period in European intellectual life. Her multinational salon paved the way for a more liberal era for European Jewry, of whose emancipation she became an influential symbol. While von Arnstein herself left no significant written work, Spiel uses the accounts of contemporaries as well as secret police reports to create not only a readable biography but also a detailed examination of the changing fortunes of Central-European Jewry. The “fair Hebrew” von Arnstein moved gracefully in both Jewish and Christian worlds as she pondered the meaning of assimilation for her people. Not for casual readers, Spiel’s account is interspersed with quotations in