



OUR SOULS  
ARE BY NATURE  
EQUAL TO YOURS

*The Life & Legacy of  
Judith Sargent Murray*

SEPTEMBER 28, 2019 –  
MARCH 31, 2020

**CAPE ANN MUSEUM**  
27 PLEASANT STREET GLOUCESTER, MA 01930



Boston Frank

**I**N RECOGNITION OF THE ONE-HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF the founding of Gloucester’s Sargent House Museum, and in anticipation of the Cape Ann Museum’s 150th anniversary in 2023, both institutions have joined with the Terra Foundation for American Art to present *Our Souls Are by Nature Equal to Yours*, a special exhibition exploring the life and legacy of Judith Sargent Murray (1751-1820). The centerpiece of the exhibition is John Singleton Copley’s 1770-72 oil portrait of Murray on loan from the Terra Foundation. When it was first painted, the work hung in Murray’s home here in Gloucester, a breathtaking testament to a young woman on the cusp of a remarkable career. During her lifetime, Judith Sargent Murray’s advocacy for equality between the sexes made her as well known as Abigail Adams and Martha Washington—one of our nation’s *founding mothers*. Today, Murray’s story continues to resonate, inspiring women and men of all ages to seek equality and justice for all.



Judith Sargent Murray was born in Gloucester in 1751, the eldest child in a ship owning family that rose to prominence during the Colonial era. Unlike her brothers who were tutored at home in preparation for college, Murray was self-educated. Lack of a formal education did not, however, prevent Murray from devoting herself to intellectual advancement and when she began writing, whether it was essays, letters or poetry, she transcended the customs of her day. The topics she tackled included politics, education, theology, money and, most importantly, the need for equality between the sexes. Many of the essays that Murray is best known for were penned while she lived in Gloucester in

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what is now the Sargent House Museum including her seminal work, *On the Equality of the Sexes*, first published in the *Massachusetts Magazine* in 1790 and then included in her three-volume work *The Gleaner* (1798).

I dare confidently believe, that from the commencement of time to the present day, there hath been as many females, as males, who, by the mere force of natural powers, have merited the crown of applause; who, thus unassisted, have seized the wreath of fame.

—JUDITH SARGENT MURRAY  
*On the Equality of the Sexes* (1790)

It was the essay *On the Equality of the Sexes* that secured a national audience for Judith Sargent Murray. In the work, Murray argued for women's equality based on the belief that men and women lived in and experienced the same world and should therefore be due the same social and political rights. "Our souls are by nature equal to yours," she wrote, "the same breath of God animates, enlivens and invigorates us...." Today, few would argue with this premise, however, in Colonial America her words would have been truly revolutionary.

While Judith Sargent Murray did not lead what today we would consider a *movement*, through her writings she laid a solid foundation for those who followed in her footsteps. In 2020, as we recognize the ratification of the 19th amendment giving women in this country the right to vote, it is important and insightful to look back on Murray's many contributions and understand her place in American history.

*First Lady of Letters: Judith Sargent Murray  
and the Struggle for Female Independence*

LECTURE by SHEILA SKEMP

Clare Leslie Marquette Professor of History at the University  
of Mississippi and Judith Sargent Murray biographer.

January 25 at 3:00 p.m.

This program is free for CAM/SHM members or with  
Museum admission. Reservations required. Reserve online at  
[camuseum.eventbrite.com](http://camuseum.eventbrite.com) or call (978) 283-0455 x10.

For information on additional related programs, please  
visit [capeannmuseum.org/events](http://capeannmuseum.org/events) or sign up to receive  
weekly updates at [capeannmuseum.org/eblast](http://capeannmuseum.org/eblast).

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Image credits: (cover) (detail) John Singleton Copley, *Portrait of Mrs. John Stevens (Judith Sargent, later Mrs. John Murray)*, 1770–72. Oil on canvas, 50 × 40 in. (127 × 101.6 cm), Terra Foundation for American Art, Daniel J. Terra Art Acquisition Endowment Fund, 2000.6. (background) Judith Sargent Murray to President George Washington, March 29, 1798. GW Papers, vol. 287-item 104; Series 4, General Correspondence, 1697–1799. Collection of the Library of Congress.