

Adams honored at last

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"A government of laws, not of men."

This concept so basic to the American way of life, so often invoked as the powerful are brought to justice, was once not a given but an idea so bold, so new that it was considered quite radical.

John Adams was surely more hard-headed New Englander than utopian when he wrote those words as part of the Massachusetts Constitution in 1780, but still it took a giant leap of faith to think it could work.

The phrase actually appears at the end of the separation-of-powers clause, the one that gave this state (and eventually this new nation) an independent judiciary, a co-equal third branch of government. It is a clause being put to the test even today on Beacon Hill.

Yesterday many of the men and the women (oh, and wouldn't that have pleased Abigail Adams) who write and carry out and interpret those laws gathered for a long-overdue tribute to this much overlooked

Founder. The man who gave Massachusetts this brilliant document under which we have survived for well over two centuries and who served as the nation's second president will finally have a monument worthy of his contributions.

Once dubbed merely the Old Courthouse (to distinguish it from the circa 1939 "New" Courthouse), this architectural gem will, when it reopens in 2004 after a \$96 million renovation, be called the John Adams Courthouse.

Supreme Judicial Court Chief Justice Margaret Marshall, who spawned the idea of naming the courthouse for the man who was also the SJC's first chief justice, said she hoped the building would be a "living monument" to the greatness of Adams' ideas.

But even more, she said, "I hope this will be a place where we honor the future of justice and not just its history."

A noble thought for a noble structure.