THE TYLER PAPERS

The College of William and Mary Library

(378 pieces [est.])

Presented June, 1955, by the
Children of Lyon G. Tyler

See also: William and Mary College Papers
**TYLER FAMILY PAPERS**

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Form of material and dates:  
Correspondence and papers covering the period 1700-1919.  
Family and personal papers.

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<tr>
<th>Number of items; Date received; Source</th>
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<tr>
<td>45 pieces; 15 November 1922; Gift of P.M. Tyler, Chester, Va.</td>
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<td>14 pieces; April, Dec. 1941; Gift of John Stewart Bryan.</td>
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<td>2 pieces; 23 February 1942; Gift of James Stone, Williamsburg, Va.</td>
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<td>1 piece; 7 March 1944; Gift of Mrs. Sue Ruffin Tyler, Holdcroft, Va.</td>
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<td>17 pieces; 22 March 1944; Gift of the children of Lyon G. Tyler.</td>
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<td>6,089 pieces; 18 November 1949; Gift of Princeton University.</td>
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<td>49,130 pieces; June 1955; Gift of Mary A. Benjamin, New York, NY.</td>
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<td>1 piece; 29 April 1957; Gift of Judge Wm. F. James, Stanford, Cal.</td>
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<td>1 piece; 23 June 1959; Gift of Mrs. Alfred H. Miles, Charlottesville, Va.</td>
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<td>2 pieces; 17 October 1960; Gift of Sarah D. Gardiner.</td>
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<td>1 piece; 28 November 1961; Purchased from Paul Richards.</td>
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<td>1 piece; October 1968; Purchased from L. Lingh, Texas.</td>
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<td>1 piece; November 1968; Gift of Mrs. Alfred H. Miles.</td>
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<td>1 piece; December 1970; Purchased from Carnegie Book Shop.</td>
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Letters of Robert Tyler in this collection that are printed in Philip Gerald Auchampaugh *Robert Tyler: Southern Rights Champion* (Duluth, 1934) are:

11 April 1851
20 July 1852
16 August 1852
12 December 1855 (letter of William M. Armstrong)
26 April 1856
9 June 1856
16 June 1856
30 June 1856
18 July 1856
25 July 1856
4 August 1856
8 August 1856
12 September 1856
4 November 1856
5 November 1856
7 November 1856
21 December 1856
10 January 1857
16 July 1857
20 November 1857
10 December 1857
14 December 1857
20 July 1858
JOHN TYLER (1790-1862)

Born at "Greenway," Charles City County, March 29, 1790. He entered the Grammar School at William and Mary and received the baccalaureate degree from the College in 1807. Admitted to the Bar two years later, Tyler began his political career in the traditional mode with his election to the Virginia House of Delegates in 1811. He served in Congress from 1821-23; the House of Delegates again from 1823-25. He was elected Governor of Virginia, 1825-27; and U.S. Senator from 1827-33. He became Vice President of the United States in 1841 and after the death of Harrison, President from 1841-45.

Tyler attempted to win Democratic renomination in 1844, but failing this, he retired from active politics until he was called upon to head the Peace Delegation to President Buchanan in 1860. At secession he declared for Virginia and was elected to the Confederate House of Representatives from Charles City County. He died in Richmond on January 16, 1862, and is buried in Hollywood cemetery, Richmond.

LETITIA CHRISTIAN TYLER (1790-1842)

Little is known of the first wife of the President. Born at "Cedar Grove," New Kent county, the Tyler papers reveal nothing of her, and the standard accounts give her scanty mention. She was in frail health towards the end of her life and was unable to perform the social duties of First Lady, a post filled by the wife of John Tyler, Jr. Letitia Tyler died in the early winter of 1842, at the White House.

The children of President John and Letitia Christian Tyler were:

MARY (1814-1858) married Henry L. Jones in 1835. He is mentioned as having lived in Williamsburg, New Kent county, and Charles City county. Their children were John, an idiot; Henry, who died young; and Robert, born in 1858. Mary died probably at the birth of Robert.

ROBERT (1817-1878) married Priscilla Cooper, daughter of the noted tragedian Thomas Fairlie Cooper. She was noted as a painter and sculptress. Evidently, Robert Tyler had a difficult time adjusting himself after his
father left the White House; his wife had written of his determined study
habits and the relapses therefrom while he prepared for the Pennsylvania
Bar. In 1846 he was created protonotary of the Virginia Court of Appeals,
holding the post until 1861. He was both active and important in the state
Democracy. Buchanan was his personal friend, so much so that when Tyler was
left destitute after the war, Buchanan offered him a $5,000 interest-free
loan which Tyler refused. While in Pennsylvania he opposed himself unrelent-
ingly against the "Know Nothings," and was active in various pro-Irish affairs;
he was a solicitor of funds for the Irish Independence League. At the out-
break of the Civil War, Tyler gave his allegiance to Virginia and was appointed
registrar of the Confederate Treasury. In 1865 he removed to Alabama where
he was again active in politics and journalism. He left five children: Letic-
tia (1842-alive 1921); Grace; Priscilla, who married Albert Goodwyn in 1870,
and was alive in 1932; Julia, married to Mr. Tyson in 1874; and Robert, living
in 1921 in Montgomery, Alabama.

JOHN (?-alive 1879) married and was later divorced from Martha Rochelle.
Their children were James Rochelle (V.M.I. '56); Martha, who never married;
and Leticitia, who married General Shands in 1860 and died three years later.
Between 1841-45 and 1877-78 there is nothing in these papers to give any
clue to Tyler's career. In the former period he was secretary to his father;
in the latter, he was attached to the customs house in Richmond. Apparently
he lived at Sherwood for an indeterminate time after his father left Washington.
The period was also one of difficult readjustment, for John is mentioned in a
letter by Julia Gardiner Tyler in 1845 as a chronic drinker. The succeeding
years found him at home. Lyon G. Tyler mentions him as a speaker at the Uni-
versity of Virginia in 1874. The last document of John Tyler Jr. is a letter
to his step-mother in 1879, regarding his new employment after leaving the
custom house.

LETITIA (1819-alive 1900) married James Semple. She left no children.
They were divorced sometime in the period 1869-70, having separated in 1867.
About this time, Letitia went to Baltimore and conducted a school there,
eventually moving to Washington from which place her last letter is dated.
Her letters, especially those to Semple, indicate a very independent and
strong personality. They show that her separation from Semple was occasioned
by a combination of his wanderlust and his undue solicitude for Mrs. Tyler.
In Semple's correspondence for Spring 1867, is a letter of proposal to Mrs.
Tyler and its answer - a cozy refusal. James Semple, himself, was a veteran
U.S. naval officer and an inveterate speculator. He was a man of fiery
temper and, if his letters are to be believed, engaged in numerous brawls and
duels. The date of his death is not known. Letters place his birth in 1821;
his last letter dates from the late '70's, and refers to his attempt to secure
the postmastership of Jacksonville, Florida.
ELIZABETH (1822-c.1855) married William Waller, of Washington, D.C.,
and by him had five children: William; John (V.M.I '62); Letitia; Mary,
who married one Horsford, of Boston; and Robert.

ALICE (1827-alive 1848) married the Rev. William Dennison. She died
during his pastorate in Louisville, leaving Bessie (Mrs. Allan Williams of
Cheerydale, Va., alive in 1915). An interesting story is told about Alice and
her husband. One Sunday in 1843, she entered the family church in Washin-
gton and found the Tyler pew occupied by two strange young men. She im-
periously ordered them to withdraw. One, young Dennison, was so taken by
Alice that he vowed to his companion that one day he would make her his wife.
The Rev. Mr. Dennison died in 1867.

TAZEWELL (1831-dead by 1896) became a physician and, sometime before
1870, moved with his wife and family to San Francisco. He had two children,
Martha and James. Tyler divorced his wife, Nannie Bridges, about 1873; one
letter gives the grounds as intemperance. She survived her husband by a
number of years; there is a letter from her to Lyon G. Tyler in 1912.

President Tyler's Second Wife

JULIA GARDINER TYLER (1821-1889)

President Tyler's second wife was born at "Castleton," Staten Island,
New York. She had refused the President's proffer of marriage in 1843 but
accepted it the next year after the death of her father in an explosion
aboard the U.S.S. Princeton. The letters of the period show that after her
marriage (in June, 1844) Julia Tyler discharged the roles of First Lady and
Virginia matron most capably. But it was not until the death of Tyler that
her substantial character asserted itself. Left with debts of over $20,000,
a decimated estate, and a wasting lawsuit, she nonetheless educated her
children and kept them together at home. As her letters of 1862-75 show, she
was never free from fiscal difficulties; yet, she betrays no bitterness or
hopelessness. Through all she remained close to her children, the only
breach (of short duration) being occasioned by her own conversion to Catho-
licism about 1875. Julia Tyler died while on a visit to Richmond and is
buried there next to her husband.

The children of President John and Julia Gardiner Tyler were:

DAVID GARDINER (1845-1927) married Mary Morris Jones and by her had four
children: Margaret, m. Stephen Chadwick, Washington state attorney; Mary Lyon;
David Gardiner; and J. Alfred, Commonwealth's Attorney for Charles City County
at this writing. Both David Gardiner Tyler and his brother, John Alexander,
fought in the Confederate army. David was a private in the Rockbridge Artillery and remained with Lee until the end. After the war he completed his education and practiced law in Charles City County. His political career was culminated by his election to the U.S. Congress. About 1907 he was a judge of this judicial district holding the post until his death in 1927.

JOHN ALEXANDER (1846-1883), the most adventurous of the family. While an engineering student in Carlsruhe, Germany, he enlisted in the Uhlan under an alias at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war. His service must have been distinguished; at the war's end in 1871, he was decorated by the Kaiser. On his return to the United States he married a cousin of his mother, Sarah Gardiner (c. 1875), and had two children: Samuel (a doctor) and Gardiner. About 1881, Tyler tired of the East and secured a position as a mining Engineer in New Mexico and Arizona where he died of acute dysentery occasioned by highly saline drinking water. Tyler was accompanied on his expeditions only by a muleteer; his letters indicate that his wife remained in the East. Sarah survived her husband. There is correspondence from her as late as 1923.

JULIA (1850-1871) died in childbirth leaving a daughter, Julia. Her husband was Will Spencer of Genesco, New York. Of him nothing is known after 1885. Distracted by his wife's death, he moved to Colorado and established a sheep farm. Whether it was successful or not his letters fail to show. He was last seen in 1885 by David Gardiner Tyler, who remarked that he looked unwell. Spencer's affliction was probably one of the heart for his marriage in 1869 was a love match, and some of the most charming letters in the collection are the exchanges between Spencer and Julia Tyler. Their daughter, Julia, was raised both by the Tylers and the Fleuros, relatives of Will Spencer. She married twice; first, George Fleurot; and later, a Mr. Cheever. One of the two was monied; many of her letters are written either from Paris or from an estate on the Riviera. Her correspondence closes in the early 1930's.

LACHLAN (1851-1902) was, perhaps, the most thwarted of the family. After early vacillations he settled on medicine as a profession, practicing it with indifferent success until his death. He studied in New York and established his first office in Jersey City, New Jersey. He wrote in one letter that although his practice began well, it ended as almost nothing. Tyler lost his health there and came home to Sherwood to recuperate. His next position was as a medical examiner for the U.S. Navy. Later he again gravitated to New York where he secured an appointment to the New York City Board of Health, his last post. Unsuccessful as a practitioner, Tyler was even less so as a businessman. Among his last letters to Lyon G. Tyler there is mention of a phamrical supply house which Lachlan hoped to establish. But, as his wife wrote after his death, he had neither capital nor stock certificates. By 1877 Tyler had married Georgia Powell, but the union produced no children. She survived him.

ROBERT FITZWALTER (1851-1927) married twice; Fannie Glen, who was living in 1899, and who had married him by 1889; and Cora Keagle about 1907. There were no children by either marriage. Tyler never adopted a profession and as
letters to Lyon G. Tyler show, was perpetually in need of money. From the 1890's he seems to have lived off of his brother's subsidies. He died at Ashland where he farmed for many years. It is highly probably that he was mentally deficient from an early age. There is no mention of any schooling for him in these letters, and a note written when he was fourteen is clearly infantile in syntax and vocabulary. His later correspondence, chiefly to Lyon G. Tyler, betrays these traits only slightly less pronounced.

LYON GARDINER (1853-1935) fashioned a career which, after 1888, is quite well known. Prior to becoming president of William and Mary, he engaged in both law and education. He received his Master's degree from the University of Virginia in 1876 and was appointed professor of Belles Lettres at William and Mary for the session 1876-77. From 1877-1879 Tyler was principal of the Memphis Academy. About 1880 he established his law practice in Richmond and became interested in politics. Elected to the House of Delegates for a single term in 1885, Tyler failed of election the next time and returned to his law practice until he came to William and Mary in 1888. Tyler married, first, Annie Tucker (1860-1921) and had Julia (1882-- ) who married James Southall Wilson in 1911; Elizabeth, wife of Commander A.H. Miles; and John, a professor of mathematics at the U.S. Naval Academy, whose wife was Betty Parker. Tyler's second wife was Susan Ruffin, a granddaughter of the noted agronomist and Confederate patriot, Edmund Ruffin. She died in 1953. By this marriage in 1923, Tyler had two children: Lyon G. Jr. (b. 1925), and Harrison Ruffin (b. 1929).

PEARL (1860-1937) was less than two years old when her father died. She married William Ellis, of Shawsville, and by him had eight children: John Tyler; Pearl; Lyon; Gardiner; Munford; Cornelia, who married Y. Evans Booker in 1916; Leilia; and, Margaret (Mrs. C.H. Topping). Her many letters, especially to Lyon G. Tyler, reveal an ordinary married existence in the rural southwest of Virginia.

ST. GEORGE TUCKER (1828-1863) was the father of Lyon G. Tyler's first wife. The son of Henry St. George Tucker and the grandson of St. George Tucker, of Williamsburg, he studied first at the University of Virginia and later at William and Mary. He was made Clerk of the Virginia Senate in 1851, and clerk of the House of Delegates in 1853, a post he held until 1860. Tucker was a literary man and the author of numerous poems, some of which are in this collection. His poetic recitations at Washington College and at William and Mary are also here. In 1857 his prose work Hansford, a Tale of Bacon's Rebellion was published and in retrospect, has been accorded first place among his works. Successful before the war, it was even more so afterwards when it was reissued as The Devoted Bride in Philadelphia. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Tucker raised a company (the Ashland Greys) which was incorporated into the 15th Virginia regiment with Tucker as Lt. Colonel. His last service with this unit was around Williamsburg. Of a weak constitution, Tucker's field service debilitated him rapidly; he died at his home in Charlottesville on January 24, 1863.

THOMAS WALKER GILMER (1802-1844) was the grandfather of Lyon Tyler's first wife, Annie Tucker. A gifted youth, Gilmer was favored by intensive and
excellent tutoring and made rapid progress, especially in the law. He entered politics in 1825 and edited the pro-Jackson Virginia Advocate in 1828. He served in the House of Delegates from 1829 until 1839, and was speaker of that body during his last two years. When President Jackson scotched the South Carolina Nullification Decree, Gilmer broke with the Democratic party. He was elected Governor of Virginia in March, 1840 but held the seat only one year. Governor Seward of New York refused to return several fugitive slaves to their Virginia owners and, in retaliation, Gilmer refused to return criminal fugitives to New York. The legislature declined to support him and he resigned in March, 1841. Gilmer was soon thereafter elected to Congress and there supported President Tyler in his split with the Whigs over the bank and tariff issues. He was rewarded with the appointment as Secretary of the Navy on February 15, 1844. A few days later he was killed with the Secretaty of State and others of note in the explosion of a cannon aboard the U.S.S. Princeton.