1995

Julia Gardiner Tyler: A nineteenth-century Southern woman

Theodore Carter DeLaney

*College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd](https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd)

Part of the United States History Commons, and the Women's Studies Commons

**Recommended Citation**


[https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-54a7-qw80](https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-54a7-qw80)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
JULIA GARDINER TYLER: 
A NINETEENTH-CENTURY SOUTHERN WOMAN

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Theodore C. DeLawer

1995
APPROVAL SHEET

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Theodore C. DeLaney

Approved, June 1995

H. Cam Walker
Edward Crapol
James Whittenburg
Thad Tate

Eugene D. Genovese
Distinguished Scholar
Retired historian
For my wife Patricia, who made this degree possible by providing support, understanding, and almost constant counsel.

For my son Damien, who has been my friend and encouragement for the past eighteen years.

For my mother Theodora, who always praised my accomplishments.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I. THE ROSE OF LONG ISLAND</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II. WASHINGTON'S SOCIAL SEASON</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III. THE AUSPICIOUS REIGN</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV. COUNTRY LIFE AND SLAVES</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER V. RAISING QUITE A LARGE FAMILY</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER VI. THE STATE OF SLAVERY IN THE SOUTH</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER VII. THE CRISIS OF SOUTHERN NATIONALISM</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER VIII. A RETREAT FROM WAR</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IX. A FAITHFUL VOTARY FOR HER CREATOR</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer wishes to express his appreciation to Professor Cam Walker, under whose guidance this investigation was conducted, for her patient guidance and criticism throughout this project. The author is also indebted to Professors Eugene D. Genovese and Edward Crapol for their careful reading and criticism of the manuscript. Finally, without the clerical assistance and support of Jennifer Ashworth completion of this dissertation would not have been possible.
## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Map of Long Island Sound</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Map of Gardiner’s Island</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Rose of Long Island</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

This study examines the life of Julia Gardiner Tyler (1829-1889) as a means of learning more about southern elite women during the nineteenth-century. It addresses the fundamental question of how an ambitious woman could fulfill personal aspirations without openly defying gender conventions and focuses on a variety of themes affecting American women including: education, domesticity, slavery, politics, and religion.

Julia was a northerner by birth and education who adopted the South when she married President John Tyler in 1844. She enthusiastically embraced and defended southern culture and its definition of womanhood. Slavery shaped the social order and resulted in a system that emphasized female inferiority and limited women's lives to the domestic sphere. From the time John Tyler left the presidency in 1845 until his death in 1862, Julia focused on her household. She was a devoted wife and mother of seven children. A household staff made up of both white and black servants freed enough of Julia's time to permit her keep abreast of political developments. In 1853 she published a defense of slavery that reaffirmed traditional southern womanhood.

Throughout the sectional crisis, Civil War, and Reconstruction, Julia was a keen observer of political developments in both the North and the South. She was an ardent southern nationalist but was unprepared for the consequences of secession. Access to family members in the North became increasingly difficult as political and military tensions heightened. During the Peninsula Campaign of 1862, Julia and her children faced danger as opposing armies moved through their neighborhood. Unwilling to risk remaining in war torn Virginia, she moved into her mother's New York home in 1863 but did not find peace there. Politics divided her mother's household and resulted in violent arguments and a protracted court battle over the Gardiner estate. During Reconstruction, Julia petitioned the federal government for reimbursement for damages to her Virginia property and a presidential widow's pension, while struggling to leave the bitterness of the war behind.

This study concludes that Julia Tyler achieved personal fulfillment through her marriage to the President of the United States. As a widow, she was a strong independent woman who displayed interest in politics but never lost focus of her role as mother. Sometimes she defied social conventions but always reaffirmed traditional southern womanhood.
JULIA GARDINER TYLER:
A NINETEENTH CENTURY SOUTHERN WOMAN
INTRODUCTION

Julia Gardiner was a twenty-four year old New York socialite when she married John Tyler in 1844. She was beautiful, wealthy, and well-educated. Although her family was well-connected, few people outside of New York knew who they were. Marrying the President of the United States changed that. Julia quickly achieved national prominence for herself and increased social prestige for her family. The marriage evoked a variety of reactions from Tyler's friends and political foes. Some critics complimented his choice, while others ridiculed the marriage. Edmund Ruffin, the southern nationalist and personal friend of John Tyler, recorded his admiration of Julia in his diary but also asserted that nothing more than "blind ambition" had prompted her to marry the fifty-four year old president.\(^1\) Ruffin's allegation suggests fundamental questions about nineteenth century women in general, and Julia Gardiner Tyler in particular. How could well-educated women like Julia fulfill personal aspirations without defying socially acceptable gender conventions? Did elite parents permit or even encourage their daughters to use marriage as a means of achieving social prestige and economic security? If so, was love also an important basis for marriage during the antebellum period?

Reconstructing Julia Gardiner Tyler's life helps us to gain more knowledge about questions like these and the role women played in nineteenth century American society. Robert Seager II first recognized her importance when he published a biography which focused on both Tylers in 1962. His work is noteworthy because it was one of the first studies that placed a woman in the broader context of United States history. Seager had no interest, however, in the complex questions about women's lives and their place in American society; instead he recognized Julia as an important vehicle for investigating her prominent husband. Like other historians who have studied John Tyler, Seager quickly discovered that he had to base his research on Julia's personal letters because most of John Tyler's papers perished in a fire during the Civil War. Fortunately, she was a vigilant and intelligent observer of more than forty years of social and political history. Julia possessed a keen knowledge of public policy debates and the men on both sides of the issues. The extraordinary size of her extant manuscript collection contains material far beyond the scope of this study. Seager used the manuscript collection masterfully, but time and publication constraints also limited the scope of his work. Properly edited, Julia's papers may one day be as useful as the civil war diaries of Mary Boykin Chesnut or the plantation journal of Fanny Kemble.

Since 1962 historians have stressed the importance of women in American history and have attempted to address questions about gender roles within the

---

family and the greater community. Most of these studies have been regional, focusing either on the Northeast or the South. Julia Tyler is unique because she identified with both regions. By accident of birth and upbringing, she belonged to an acquisitive, capitalistic New York family with an American pedigree dating back to 1635. She adopted the South when she married John Tyler. This study examines Julia’s relationship to both regions but focuses primarily on her relationship with the patriarchal world of the Old South and its definition of southern womanhood. In this context, her role as a political wife and devoted mother are important. The study also explores differences and similarities between elite women in the North and the South.

In addition, this work is an examination of one woman’s relationship with slavery and her own unique management style. Julia demonstrated a keen interest in the peculiar institution and a desire to learn as much as possible about slave culture. Yet her views about slavery are a paradox. Publicly, Julia defended the merits of slavery and its superiority over free white labor, and at the same time, she demonstrated a preference for free white laborers within her own household. Her experiences with slavery may shed additional light on the relationship between plantation mistresses and their black household workers.

The problems that Julia faced during the Civil War and Reconstruction are another area of investigation. Historians have only begun to unravel the complex problems faced by women during times of war, and the Civil War years were particularly difficult. Unprotected women legitimately feared molestation and the possibility that invading armies might destroy their homes in the heat of battle.
The necessities of the Confederacy contradicted one of the cardinal domestic virtues of southern womanhood. Traditionally, southerners had imbued their daughters with the principle of protecting family members, but the war required a willingness to sacrifice husbands and sons. Julia Tyler's life demonstrates the dilemma women faced when required to put nationhood before family. Her views about the war are another paradox. Although an ardent secessionist and southern nationalist, Julia looked to the North for her own and her children's safety and subsistence after 1862. While Julia's war experiences were unique, she may serve to enhance our understanding of the hundreds (perhaps thousands) of southern women who encouraged their husbands and sons to put their families first and desert the Confederate Army.

Throughout her life, Julia Gardiner Tyler was a political conservative who sometimes defied traditional social norms. Within her own realm, she demonstrated that prominent women wielded an extraordinary amount of influence during the nineteenth century. Julia's life suggests that a southern woman could sometimes step outside of her separate sphere without threatening the established social order. After the war, she tacitly accepted change because it was in her own best interest to do so. The old social order was in chaos, and many southern women were bitter and disillusioned. Julia's more pragmatic approach was a result of her northern background and conversion to Roman Catholicism. Many Union officers had treated her with respect and honor during the war years. She recognized them and other northerners as trusted friends. More important, Julia understood the importance of reconciliation and wanted to
see the nation move beyond the political prejudices that separated the North and South.
In 1835 Julia Gardiner left her family's home in East Hampton, Long Island, to attend boarding school in Manhattan. During the antebellum period, the 120 mile journey to the city required nearly two days of travel, and this distance must have made a lasting impression on a fifteen year old girl who had never been away from her family. The distance was just as great for her parents, but the opportunity to attend a good school required the sacrifice of a temporary family separation. More important, her three-year stay in boarding school represented the only formal part of Julia's education and demonstrates the importance of education in the development of nineteenth century elite women. Like most families of means, Juliana and David Gardiner provided their daughter with a private tutor at an earlier age. After Madame Chegaray's school, Julia's education had an important informal component—a grand European tour. This trip lasted one year and provided Julia Gardiner with broader experiences than the boarding school curriculum had offered. European trips were important educational experiences, and they were not unusual for wealthy antebellum Americans.

1Mary Hunting Rattray, "Julia Gardiner Tyler," The Yorker May 1944, 15. Mary Rattray reports that private tutors educated Julia prior to her enrollment at Madame Chegaray's school. Rattray's article lacks footnotes, but other evidence suggests that she is correct.
Like Julia, most wealthy nineteenth century children benefitted from home tutoring before going away to boarding school. Mary Beth Norton observes that late eighteenth century children from literate households usually had learned to read by the time they were six years old and to write by age eight. After learning the essentials of reading and writing children often attended dame schools (schools run by widows or single women as a means of earning a living) if such schools were available. Julia Gardiner's brothers attended Clinton Academy, located in East Hampton, but there were no dame schools in the town. David and Juliana Gardiner had limited options for their daughters. After Julia and Margaret learned basic skills from home tutors, they had to attend female academies. Women's academies flourished during the nineteenth century, usually under the name "finishing school." In spite of this designation, which suggests that these academies prepared women in the "genteel accomplishments," teachers in the academies aspired to educate their students in academic subjects. Women's academies had collegiate components and advertised their more strenuous curricula by describing themselves as "seminaries." Prominent families regarded


Madame Chegaray's Institute as one of the principal female seminaries in New York City.¹

Madame Heloise Desaboye Chegaray came to the United States during the early part of the nineteenth century and opened her school in 1814. She became one of New York City's most notable teachers, and her school chiefly attracted students from a distinguished list of wealthy New York families which included the Astors, Crugers, Delafields, De Wolfes, Lorillards, and Van Renssalaers. The school also drew a few prominent students from other states.²

Julia's family was wealthy, but not nearly as wealthy as the families of other students at the school. In 1842 Moses Y. Beach observed that David Gardiner was worth $150,000. Julia Lorillard's father, in contrast, was a millionaire.³ The Gardiners were not as wealthy as the Astors or the Lorillards, but they did view themselves as American aristocrats. David Gardiner was a descendant of Lion Gardiner, an English adventurer and military engineer, who arrived in American in 1635. The Puritan aristocrats Lord Saye and Sele and Lord Brooke had

---

¹ In spite of the wealthy clientele of Chegaray's Institute, no one has written a history of this academy. In the absence of school records, categorizing Chegaray's Institute as a finishing school or a collegiate school is not possible. Yet, the guide New York As Is In 1833 listed Madame Chegaray's as one of twenty-three principal female seminaries.


Illustration 1.

Map of Long Island Sound. [From: Curtiss C. Gardiner, Lion Gardiner And His Descendants (St. Louis: A. Whipple, Publisher, 1890).]
commissioned Lion to build Saybrook Fort near the site where the Connecticut River empties into Long Island Sound. While working on this project, he won the friendship of local Indians, who sold him a large island in Long Island Sound called Manchonacke. Lion changed its name to Isle of Wight, but eventually it became known as Gardiner's Island. Acquisition of this large tract of land transformed him into a landed gentleman and enabled him to become a wealthy man.\(^7\)

Although David was a seventh generation descendant of Lion Gardiner, he was not an heir to the island estate and had to seek other means of acquiring wealth. After graduating from Yale College in 1804, he studied law with Judge Sylvanus Miller in New York City.\(^8\) Together with Henry Remsen, Miller also served as guardian of Juliana McLachlan, who had inherited part of the estate of her father Michael when he died intestate.\(^9\) Although the date of McLachlan's death is unknown, Juliana was already a resident of the Miller home when she met David Gardiner. Her father had been a Scottish emigrant who operated a New York City brewery and amassed a substantial fortune in Manhattan real


\(^{8}\)Curtiss C. Gardiner, editor, *Lion Gardiner and His Descendants 1599-1890* St. Louis: A. Whipple, Publisher, 1890), 149.

\(^{9}\)"The President and His Bride," *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia) 1 July 1844.
Outline map of the 3300 acre Gardiner's Island.
estate holdings. Initially, Juliana's brother Alexander inherited the bulk of the estate, but he died in 1819.

David married Juliana in 1816, and they moved to Gardiner's Island. His cousin John Lyon Gardiner, the seventh proprietor of Gardiner's Island, had died that year, and his widow invited David to lease the estate until her twelve year old son reached maturity. He accepted the offer and became regent of the island. When Juliana's brother died without a wife, she inherited the remainder of Michael McLachlan's estate. In spite of their new wealth, David continued to run the island's farm operations until 1822. During their residence on Gardiner's Island, Juliana gave birth to all four of their children: David Lyon in 1816; Alexander in 1818; Julia in 1820; and Margaret in 1822.

David and Juliana purchased a home in East Hampton in 1822, and except for a brief political career as state senator from 1825 to 1828, he never worked again. Since early nineteenth-century coverture laws in New York gave men full control of their wives' inheritance, David assumed full responsibility of managing Juliana's real estate holdings. The rental income from the Manhattan property was substantial, and they could well afford to send their daughter to Chegaray's Institute. Yet, no matter how happy David was with his new status, he was not a millionaire and would never be.

---


Julia's fascination with her wealthier classmates continued throughout her stay at Chegaray's Institute. She wrote long letters to her mother describing the habits and the clothing of these girls, and there was never a hint of envy. As far as Julia was concerned, the Gardiners were as important as the Van Renssalaers or the Astors, and Juliana did everything in her power to reinforce that conviction. She went out of her way to make sure Julia had every luxury possible.

Surprisingly, Juliana seldom inquired about academic progress, and Julia did not volunteer any information. Instead their letters focused on East Hampton gossip, current fashions, and social events. Juliana and Julia rarely discussed course offerings or the quality of instruction.

On one occasion when Juliana did mention the curriculum, she advised Julia on course selections.

It would be better for you to attend to some of the higher English branches if you have time although I would prefer you to devote yourself to the French language & music provided you can be wholly occupied with these branches consistent with the regulations of the school—of this you can judge by this time.12

If Julia's studies consisted only of French, English, and music, her education at Madame Chegaray's was no more than training in the "genteel accomplishments"—a finishing school education. Usually called a "nice accomplishment," knowledge of French merely permitted a woman to impress her husband's friends by injecting a few French phrases into the conversation.13

---

12Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner, 5 April 1835. Gardiner Family Papers, Yale University Library.

13Thompson, 33.
Musical knowledge also provided elite women with a means of entertaining polite friends after dinner. David and Juliana wanted Julia to have more than an ornamental education, and they were serious about language study.

The Gardiners expected all of their children regardless of gender to achieve proficiency in French. No one understood this any better than their son Alexander. He arranged to add French to his schedule after David expressed his concern:

You say in your letter that you wish me to pay particular attention to the French language; as it is altogether an optional study with us now, I have never attended the recitations. I think I will speak to Prof. McLean about it tomorrow for the class is now so small—containing only five or six—I think the advantages are far greater than before when there was a class of 50 or 60 scholars.  

David had a good reading knowledge of French, but his spoken proficiency was not as good. His own love for the language may have prompted him to require both his sons and his daughters to learn French.

Whether any of the Gardiner children ever acquired a love for French is unknown. None of them complained about their parents' language requirement. Although immersed in their studies at Princeton, David Lyon and Alexander were fully aware that their parents also required Julia and Margaret to learn French. In a letter to his father, Alexander expressed delight in his sisters' studies: "I am glad you have found such pleasant situations; and expect when I hear Julia and

---

Margaret rowel (roll) off (as Prof. McLean has it) the French that I shall be astonished."15

Julia and her brother David were less competent in language studies than Margaret and Alexander. Attempting to give Julia encouragement, Juliana Gardiner wrote that "David [had] received a letter from Margaret written in french [sic] a word of which none of us could read except your Pa. I presume you can do the same thing and probably more as your opportunity of acquiring the language would be considered the best." She expected Julia to take full advantage of her French-born teacher, Madame Chegaray. Yet after nearly two years at Madame Chegaray's, Julia failed to demonstrate progress in French, while Margaret, who attended a school which attracted girls of a "middling class," could show off her superior language skills by sending letters home that only her father could read.16

While David demonstrated substantial interest in Julia's education, he did not correspond with her while she was away at school. Unwilling to assume the burden of writing to all four of his children, he only wrote to his sons, and he gave Juliana the responsibility of corresponding with Julia and Margaret. What encouragement and advice they received came only from their mother. Julia missed her father's attention and protested the lack of letters from him. In an 1835 letter to her mother Julia wrote, "Tell Pa I think he might write to me; he

15Ibid.

16Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner, 12 February 1837. Yale University Library.
has not since I have been here." Three years later Julia continued to complain when she again mentioned the absence of his letters. "Why does not Pa write to me? I have not heard from him since I have been here! When is he coming to the city? He said in May, but I do not see him yet."

Aside from the comfort that Julia might have taken in correspondence with her father, letters from him would have focused on school work and her progress, rather than social events. The letters he exchanged with Alexander usually included lively discussions about academic courses, assignments, and other college matters. By contrast, Juliana usually limited herself to a one line suggestion that Julia apply herself to her studies. Yet she deserves much of the credit for selecting the schools that Julia and Margaret attended.

Although there are no extant descriptions of Madame Chegaray’s curriculum, historians have described the course of study at similar academies for elite girls and note that by the 1830’s educators had made substantial improvements in the education of women. As Linda Kerber observes, the literacy gap between American men and women had diminished by 1830. Anne D. Gordon notes that the Young Ladies Academy of Philadelphia provided a rigorous course of studies at a much earlier date. During public examinations in 1787, teachers tested the girls’ knowledge of arithmetic, spelling, reading, writing, and geography. That same year the school offered lectures in chemistry and natural

---


philosophy. By 1790 an expanded curriculum included rhetoric, English grammar, and composition. Teachers at the Young Ladies Academy of Philadelphia believed that women differed from men in everything except their capacity to reason.19 The South also moved ahead in the area of female education. Some southern schools like Salem Academy and Wesleyan Female College of Macon offered classical education for women.20 The Livingston Female Academy in Alabama also compared favorably with women's schools in other parts of the nation.21

The Brooklyn Female Academy also offered socially prominent women education rather than training in the "genteel accomplishments." Founded ten years after Julia began her studies at Madame Chegaray's, this Brooklyn school offered English classics, algebra, rhetoric, natural philosophy, Latin, science, and uranography (the mapping of celestial bodies). These classes shared the curriculum with more traditional courses like spelling, arithmetic, geography, drawing, grammar, American history, and the Bible. Even the best female academies of the antebellum period did not provide the classical curriculum. Yet the existence of schools like Brooklyn Female Academy indicate the possibility

---


21 Ralph M. Lyon, "The Early Years of Livingston Female Academy," Alabama Historical Quarterly (Fall 1975): 201.
that other schools tried to offer a better education than finishing schools. Indeed the faculty of the Brooklyn Female Academy did challenge their students to develop their powers of reasoning.  

There were other schools with academic curricula like the Brooklyn Female Academy and the Young Ladies Academy of Philadelphia. Since Chegaray’s Institute attracted the daughters of prominent New York families, the school probably offered a course of study that was comparable to the curricula of other good institutions in the area. Moreover, if Chegaray’s Institute had not offered a rigorous curriculum, Julia would not have remained there for three years. Attainment of genteel accomplishments hardly required that much time. Even the sons of southern planters, who went to college to acquire educational seasoning, remained an average of only two years. More important, Julia Gardiner later proved that she had acquired skills in rhetoric and business management. She also demonstrated knowledge of politics, history, geography, and English grammar. Her rhetorical abilities and her general knowledge demonstrated educational training which ranged far beyond "genteel accomplishments."

In spite of the academic merits of Chegaray’s Institute, Juliana liked the school because of its wealthy student body. Margaret’s school never pleased her because the students’ families did not rank among New York’s more elite.

---

class.\textsuperscript{23} Juliana spent most of her time trying to keep Julia dressed as fashionably as her classmates. In April 1835 she wrote, "I have sent two white corded petticoats, as you will require at least two a week in the dust of New York."\textsuperscript{16} The following month she focused on Julia's feet and advised her to "open an account for shoes at Mr. Brower's, my old shoe maker's. I like his make of shoes better than Middleton."\textsuperscript{17} At other times Juliana concerned herself with seasonal fashions. "You must not be so very much afraid of being extravagant you must recollect that it requires considerable money to be fashionable in the city and I wish you to appear in a manner that will be agreeable." \textsuperscript{18}

Fashions were a major concern for both mother and daughter, but an education in feminine virtues was also important, and Juliana worked diligently to reinforce those values she had taught Julia at home. Although Madame Chegaray's school provided a safe haven in which female students could study and grow to maturity, Juliana did not abdicate her responsibilities. Like most mothers, she worried about her daughter and how she would respond to the people around her. Always reassuring Julia that she trusted her sense of propriety, Juliana advised her daughter that she could not be too cautious. "If you accept the invitations of your friends and they inquire with interest how you like your school

\textsuperscript{23}Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner, 12 February 1837. Yale University.

\textsuperscript{16}Juliana Gardiner to Julia Gardiner, 23 April 1835. Yale University.

\textsuperscript{17}Juliana Gardiner to Julia Gardiner, 3 May 1835. "Letters From Tyler Trunks," 167.

\textsuperscript{18}Juliana Gardiner to Julia Gardiner, undated. Yale University.
if you cannot approve of everything do not condemn anything. Open your heart
to your parents only."19

Juliana's fears about her daughter's well-being increased when Julia was
away from the safety of Madame Chegaray's. Once Julia left school to visit Mrs.
Hannah Clinton, a New York City resident and daughter of the wealthy Long
Island merchant Walter Franklin.20 Although Mrs. Clinton was a woman of
considerable social prestige, Juliana still had reservations: "I feel a great anxiety
about you altho' I do not believe there is the least occasion about it but shut out
of the world as I am here I feel almost incompetent to give you directions of any
kind. Your own good sense must guide you with Mrs. Clinton's advice."21 Even
though Juliana trusted Julia, her advice was often stern and even unwarranted.
From the seclusion of her East Hampton home, she left nothing to chance,
especially the protection of Julia's reputation. Juliana was particularly cautious
about written secrets. Anxious that her letters should not fall into the hands of
Julia's classmates Juliana advised her daughter to destroy all letters "as soon as
read."22 Later she cautioned Julia not to commit her own private thoughts to
paper. "When you write Eliza be careful of your expressing any particular
sentiments. I do not like confidential letters between girls. I do not know that

19 Juliana Gardiner to Julia Gardiner, 5 April 1835. Yale University.

20 Moses Yale Beach, The Wealthy Citizens of New York, reprint of the 1845 and 1855

21 Juliana Gardiner to Julia Gardiner, undated. Yale University.

22 Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner, 5 April 1835. Yale University.
you have any secrets, it is best not to write any."\textsuperscript{23} Juliana feared gossip and advised Julia that "the greatest circumspection is requisite in all actions and words." According to Juliana, only the most cautious people commanded respect; therefore, "it is better to be guarded and even distant [rather] than too familiar."\textsuperscript{24}

Juliana also worried that Julia's friends would lead her astray. She insisted upon Julia thinking for herself and advised her to form opinions independently of her friends. More important, Juliana wanted to inspire Julia to be fair and honest in her relationships with other girls at the school. "You must also aim at being correct and take an independent stand as it will never answer for you to lean too much upon your companions. Be polite & pleasant to them all."\textsuperscript{25}

Later she advised Julia to be a strong, self-reliant person, who would never permit others to discover her weaknesses. More than anything, Juliana hoped Julia would cultivate a variety of virtues by learning self-discipline:

\begin{quote}
Vanity is to others one of the most offensive of affirmatives and ought never \textsuperscript{26} to be discovered or cherished. The discipline of life is very severe it is in truth a thorny path and the less you expect the less you will be disappointed. Believe me there is very little sincerity or friendship in the world and you must not look for it.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{23}Juliana Gardiner to Julia Gardiner, 12 February 1837. Yale University.

\textsuperscript{24}Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner, 2 June 1835. College of William & Mary.

\textsuperscript{25}Juliana Gardiner to Julia Gardiner, 5 April (year unknown). Yale University.

\textsuperscript{26}Juliana Gardiner to Julia Gardiner, 2 June 1835. College of William & Mary.
Growing up in the home of a merchant and entrepreneur had enabled Juliana to develop a healthy mistrust for the world. She hoped to convey some of her own cautious nature to Julia but soon discovered that teaching virtues and survival skills by letter was not easy. Nonetheless, Juliana persisted. The values she hoped to teach were as important as the skills taught by Madame Chegaray.

Julia, for her part, was a typical school girl. She enjoyed the company of her friends and missed them when she went home to East Hampton. Her brother, Alexander, was incredulous when he learned that his sister pined for her friends during a holiday. "Lonesome at home! Tell her it is all fudge—I am lonesome away from home even among two or three hundred." At Madame Chegaray's, Julia was one of forty girls, and she greatly enjoyed the companionship of her peers. In her letters, however, she referred only to Julia Lorillard as a friend.

Like other female academies, Madame Chegaray's school emphasized the differences between male and female roles. While providing skills in French grammar or mathematics, antebellum academies for girls also trained students in feminine deportment, dress, and housekeeping. Domestic skills were a vital part of the woman's sphere, and the academies worked hard to prepare students to be efficient homemakers. And in a society where the future of the country depended


on mothers' ability to teach their children republican principles, the academies also focused on motherhood and child-rearing.

Marriage and childcare were several years in the future for Julia when she left Madame Chegaray's School in 1838. Her return to remote East Hampton was difficult after three years in New York City. Yet, however lonely the tiny village may have been during the year following her departure from Madame Chegaray's school, she did not complain. By the time she returned to East Hampton, David had already started planning a European tour for his wife and daughters. There was one curious event, however, that caused him to hasten the time of their departure.

Sometime after leaving Madame Chegaray's School Julia acquired a new title, "The Rose of Long Island." The origin is unclear, but most residents of East Hampton knew that the name referred to her. A minor family crisis occurred when a lithograph advertisement for a cheap clothing store appeared that bore Julia's image and the caption, "The Rose of Long Island." Actually an advertisement for an inexpensive clothier called Bogert & Mecamly, the flyer pictured her wearing heavy winter attire but carrying a summer parasol. Julia stands next to a man in a heavy fur-lined coat, and on her arm hangs a sign which says, "T'll purchase at Bogert & Mecamly's No. 86 Ninth avenue. Their Goods are Beautiful & Astonishingly Cheap." (See illustration 3.) Robert Seager argues...

29 "Did Miss Gardiner Indorse [sic] A Shop?" New York Sun, 27 June 1939.

Family tradition is the only evidence that the image is actually Julia Gardiner. Many years later Sarah Diodati Gardiner, Julia's niece, presented the lithograph to the City Museum of New York.
The "Rose of Long Island." This 1840 lithograph depicts a young woman labelled "The Rose of Long Island," a nickname that East Hampton Residents identified with Julia Gardiner. [From The New York Sun, 27 June 1939]
that Julia Gardiner posed for the lithograph and supports his argument by suggesting that David Gardiner’s failure to sue Bogert & Mecamly is evidence that she was a willing participant. He speculates that both Gardiners were embarrassed by the lithograph. Most socially prominent families of the nineteenth century would have objected to having a daughter’s image circulated on a cheap hand bill. But the situation became ever more awkward when a love poem to the "Rose of Long Island" appeared on page one of the Brooklyn Daily News of 11 May 1840.30

Soon after the "Rose of Long Island" incident the Gardiners departed for Europe. Margaret’s diary provides a detailed account of the carefully planned trip designed to round out her and Julia’s education. David and Juliana hoped to show their daughters major European capitals and notable landmarks. Armed with letters of introduction to prominent Europeans, they hoped to gain entry to the parlors of heads of state and other important people, while providing their daughters with exposure to European government, history, religion and art.

Michael O’Brien has noted the importance of Europe in the intellectual lives of elite Americans.31 Arduous trips across the Atlantic Ocean became momentous events in the lives of many prominent Americans during the antebellum period. For most people a trans-Atlantic voyage was a once in a lifetime experience. So important were these tours, Drew Gilpin Faust notes, that

30Seager, pp. 35, 563.

antebellum Americans expected them to transform both their character and their attitudes. Most studies of such tours focus on the experiences of young men, some of whom studied abroad for six months or more at European institutions, like the University of Gottingen in Germany. Yet young men were not the only Americans who went abroad. Family groups were not unusual. Many American travelers kept careful accounts of their journeys, and Margaret recorded the events of their tour with great precision. Both Julia and her father kept diaries too, but they often were too busy or too tired to make entries. Of the three journals, only Margaret’s diary survives. According to William R. Taylor, when northern men made these tours they were usually more serious than southerners, for whom the trips were mostly pleasure jaunts. Julia and Margaret Gardiner were serious about their trip too, but did not have the option of attending European universities like many northern men. They recognized that their European excursion was an opportunity for both cultural and intellectual growth. While abroad they absorbed as much knowledge as possible. They also used the trip to improve their skills in spoken French.

During the nineteenth century, the month-long ocean passage to Europe was both uncomfortable and fatiguing. The Gardiner’s trip began on 25

---


September 1840 and must have been particularly difficult for them, but an entire month spent aboard ship was a way of learning the virtue of patience. Social activities aboard ship included backgammon, card games, music, and conversation. Otherwise the ship was like a prison. During long days on the high seas there was often insufficient wind to drive the ship forward. Few things could have been more frustrating than the tight quarters of a ship which depended on the whims of nature. Margaret described their situation: "The novelty which one unaccustomed to a life at sea naturally experiences on the first embarkation is, after a few days, generally succeeded by dull monotony, and the undiversified routine of each day soon fails to produce its early sensations of pleasure." No matter how monotonous Julia and Margaret may have found the cruise across the Atlantic, they put unpleasant memories of the voyage behind once they began exploring Europe. The family arrived in England on 24 October 1840, one month after leaving New York.

In England, Juliana—always prone to hypochondria—took to bed insisting that she was ill. This left David and his two daughters on their own to explore their surroundings, and they lost no time getting started. The first stop was the town hall, a building "containing six of the most splendid rooms in the kingdom," where they admired portraits of George III, George IV and the Duke of York. From their exploration of town hall, David took Julia and Margaret to a large store where they could see unusual items from around the world. And on their return to their lodging, they stopped at the Queen’s Arms to call on another

passenger they had met aboard ship. Almost everyday during their stay in Europe, Julia and Margaret experienced a routine that involved extensive sightseeing and a good deal of socializing. As they saw Europe's landmarks, they focused on history, art, and architecture. Social events often afforded the opportunity for them to learn about government and European gentry. But they also witnessed masses of Europe's beggars as they traveled through the countryside. When the family travelled through Dover, they saw "cottages of the peasantry o'er shadowed with the graceful ivy [sic]—with their pretty gardens, giving them such an air of simplicity and comfort!"  

The peasant cottages of England seemed pleasant enough, but beggars filled the road that led from Boulogne to Paris and slowed the progress of the Gardiner carriage. They cried, "pour l'amour de Dieu for charity" and excited both the "sympathy and generosity" of the Gardiner family. As the family traveled about northern France in search of historic monuments, their carriage attracted scores of beggars. Indigent people seemed more noticeable in Italy than in other countries. While in Ireland, Margaret wrote, "It is truly melancholy to observe the poverty and destitution which pervades more than half the population." In 1853 Julia still remembered the horrible images of poverty in Europe when she published a response to an English antislavery testimonial. She had not forgotten the image of an "exhausted mother, still straining her perishing child to her breast,  

36Ibid., 28-29.
while the unhappy husband and father, himself foodless and raimentless, sheds drops of agony over the heartrending scene."

Ironically, Julia had failed to notice poor Americans when she attended school in Manhattan. Christine Stansell has written that the problems associated with poverty were as noticeable in New York City as elsewhere. Visitors could not help noticing the "drunkenness and contentiousness." The lot of the poor in antebellum New York "entailed great hardships for most laboring people," and "women's difficulties were especially severe." In the United States the Gardiners had no interest in the poor, but they never forgot the face of poverty in Europe. When Julia challenged the Duchess of Sutherland ten years later, she remembered the faces of beggars in London with amazing clarity. Julia may have neglected her own European diary, but she would remember all of Europe's faults in great detail.

In France Julia and Margaret worked hard to refine their conversational French. Now they could build on what they had learned earlier. David hired a tutor who came to the hotel each day to instruct his daughters. The tutor guaranteed a "thorough knowledge of the language in thirty lessons" and "ability to speak well in fifteen. To be understood, or, at least to have a good pronunciation

37Ibid., 30, 54, 150; Julia Gardiner Tyler. "A Letter to The Duchess of Sutherland and Ladies of England In Reply To Their "Christian Address" On The Subject of Slavery in the Southern States." Southern Literary Messenger Press. (February 1853), 7.


39Gardiner, Leaves From A Young Girl's Diary, 39.
in eight." He complimented Julia and Margaret on their attentiveness and noted that they both had "beautiful pronunciation." Study of the language enabled Julia and Margaret to take full advantage of their excursions through France. Visits to famous shrines or government buildings had far more meaning for them after they had improved their comprehension of the language. The Marquis de Lafayette, whom they had met three weeks earlier, gave them tickets to the Chamber of Deputies, where the two young women could study the operation of French government. On December 22, 1840, Julia and Margaret Gardiner were there for three hours listening to a debate about child labor.40

Letters of introduction provided access to places and people who were out of the reach of ordinary foreigners. Madame Lafayette even gave the Gardiner family tickets for three terrace seats at the Chamber of Deputies on December 15, 1840, to view the Emperor Napoleon’s funeral procession. (Napoleon died in 1821, but received a state funeral a generation later.) Another connection supplied three tickets to the Chapelle des Invalides where the actual funeral rites took place:

Pa and Julia, habited in black, availed themselves of the tickets for the Chapelle des Invalides, while Mr. I—y accompanied Ma and myself to the terrace of the Chamber of Deputies, the most eligible situation that could have been offered for viewing the procession. Here we remained until two, when the cortege entered Paris. From our position we had a perfect view of the procession as it wound through the Champs Elysees. Pa and J[ulia] came in at six and reported the scene at the Invalides as defying all description.41

40Ibid., 40, 45.
41Ibid., 44.
Julia and Margaret believed they were witnesses to history and not merely tourists fascinated by historical places and events. As they traveled through Europe, their knowledge of history helped them to appreciate each city or monument. In England they visited statues of Horatio Nelson, the hero of the Battle of Trafalgar, and Sir George Canning, British prime minister. Julia’s memories of English shrines was still vivid in 1853. At the Church of St. Roch in France the Gardiner sisters noted the burial place of the famous French dramatist, Pierre Corneille. When they visited the Cathedral of Notre Dame, they examined the building very carefully because a previous reading of Victor Hugo’s Notre Dame de Paris had sparked their interests. This kind of journal entry was no trivial matter since in 1840 the average antebellum American had never heard of people like Horatio Nelson or Pierre Corneille or traveled across the Atlantic Ocean or read novels by Victor Hugo.

In addition to visiting monuments to celebrated people of the past, they also encountered living notables. In Paris, Juliana, Julia, and Margaret were three of twenty-eight American women and a much larger group of English women presented to the French royal family. They marveled at the lavish decorations of the salon and the splendid dresses of the other women. "The ladies were presented in file to the King, Queen, Duchesse de Nemours, Princess Clementine,

---

42 Ibid., 16.

43 Julia Gardiner Tyler, "A Letter to The Duchess of Sutherland and Ladies of England... On The Subject of Slavery In The Southern States," 7.

44 Gardiner, Leaves From A Young Girl's Diary, 38.
Madame Adelaide (the King’s sister), Duc d’Orleans and Prince de Joinville.” The King stopped to talk to Julia and Margaret long enough to ask whether they were sisters before moving on. The Queen greeted them with a mixture of French and English that they could not comprehend. In silence they simply responded by bowing.45

Both Julia and Margaret were interested in music and the visual arts. In France their father also hired music tutors and obtained a guitar for Julia and a piano for Margaret. Some days they spent hours studying French and practicing their music. They also enjoyed the performance of good music and attended operas while abroad. In Boulogne, for instance, Julia and Margaret Gardiner attended a performance of Gaetano Donizetti’s The Elixir of Love. Although they did not find the Italian Opera House as fashionably decorated or as spacious as French Opera houses, they did enjoy the singers.46

The study of both French and music were traditional pursuits for elite women of the nineteenth century. Although they did try to elevate their knowledge of the language above the level of "genteel accomplishment," their study of music was never serious. Both viewed study of guitar and piano in more traditional terms. Ability to play a musical instrument allowed women to entertain themselves as well as house guests, part of their roles within the domestic sphere. Study of music also enabled Julia and Margaret to have some understanding of the concerts they attended.


46Gardiner Leaves From a Young Girl’s Diary, 39-40, 45, 33.
They also enjoyed the visual arts and visited the great museums of Europe. When they first visited the Louvre on December 17, 1840, they were impressed with the size of the building. After nearly four hours they had seen only a small fraction of the "paintings and curiosities." Margaret noted that they needed to return for a second visit since "one gallery is nearly half a mile in extent." She also commented on the art works she and Julia saw at the Bodleian Library in Oxford—portraits by Raphael and a seascape by the French painter Claude Lorrain (also called Claude Gellee). In the Hague they saw works by well-known masters like Rembrandt, Holbein, Albrecht Durer, Peter Paul Rubens, and other noted artists.47

While in Europe, they also became familiar with the Roman Catholic Church. Although Juliana Gardiner had grown up a Roman Catholic, the family usually attended a Presbyterian church in East Hampton. This may have been Julia's first exposure to the church that she embraced after the Civil War. They attended Masses in Catholic churches in both France and Italy, and were in Rome for Holy Week services.

St. Peter's Basilica fascinated Julia and Margaret. The Swiss Guard lined up in front of the entrance of the chapel with bayonets drawn to keep the large crowd at bay. As Julia and Margaret approached with a young female friend from New York, they signaled the men of the Swiss Guard who made an opening in their line just sufficient for them to get through. Once they had entered the Guard quickly closed ranks behind them. Since this enabled them to procure

47Ibid., 45, 141-142, 121-122.
good seats, they repeated their signal to the Swiss Guard on two successive days and again easily gained early entry to the chapel. Fully aware of the history of the celibate Swiss Guard and their relationship to the Pope, Julia and Margaret felt no inhibitions about flirting with these men. Always able to provide background information about whatever she saw, Margaret noted that "Michael Angelo" [sic] had originally designed the Swiss Guard’s costume.48

Together with their friend, Margaret and Julia watched the Pope wash the feet of thirteen parish priests from different nations before serving them communion at a table decorated with flowers. Margaret managed to get one of the flowers. Later at the Hospital Pellegrini, they watched noble women symbolically washing the feet and serving poor pilgrims at table.49 Aside from attending Holy Week services in Rome, the trip would not have been complete if they had not had the opportunity of meeting the pope. Accordingly, the American consul escorted David and his veiled wife and daughters to the papal apartments and formally presented them to Pope Gregory XVI who received them in a sparse apartment that had no furniture except the "small pine table, on which he rested." He talked with the family for twenty minutes on "general subjects."50 While still in the Vatican David also introduced his wife and daughters to several cardinals,

48Ibid., 97.
49Ibid., 98.
50Ibid., 78.
to whom he bore letters of introduction. Presenting Julia and Margaret to prominent Europeans was a high priority for him.

Together Julia and Margaret saw as much of the European countryside as possible. During their tour nothing impressed them more than their trip to Mount Vesuvius. Descent into an active volcano demonstrated the extent to which David Gardiner was willing to go in order to broaden the experience of both his daughters and himself. Mount Vesuvius is near the Bay of Naples, and Margaret noted that nothing could tempt her to live in this volcanic region. In spite of their reservations about the danger, David Gardiner took his wife and daughters to explore the area. Travelling south of Naples, they journeyed about four miles to the village of Resina. David rode a horse and the women rode donkeys as far as the base of Mt. Vesuvius. From there, they began their ascent on foot.

Unsatisfied with his view from the mountain top, David began to descend into the mouth of the crater with Julia and Margaret following. The Italian guides protested, arguing that "no lady had ever ventured [down to the crater] before." Too frightened to follow, Juliana remained on top of the mountain. Before they reached the crater the mountain rumbled and the air filled with a sulphurous-smelling smoke. Halfway down Julia "looked back and her courage forsook her. She hesitated, and begged me [Margaret] to return, but nothing daunted I represented the danger as equally shared and finally succeeded in persuading her to continue." Although braver than Julia, Margaret agreed that the descent to

51 Ibid., 103.
52 Ibid., 83.
the crater was frightening. The temperature rose so dramatically during their hike that the heat of the stones and ashes virtually destroyed Margaret’s shoes before they had reached the bottom.

Once there Julia and Margaret found the sulphur odor almost unbearable. In boyish manner, David Gardiner rolled a large lava stone into the crater. And Margaret noted that the splash sounded like something falling into molten lead. At that moment "an angry tone [came] from Vulcan as if to chide Pa for his temerity." When the volume of smoke intensified, they became even more frightened and sat down while holding their "mouths to prevent suffocation."

After regaining their confidence, they returned to the top of the mountain just as the wind changed and smoke completely shrouded the "orifice—not even the outline was discernible, and, as the vapour closed over the danger, we seemed to have awakened from a horrible vision."53

Margaret noted that they began their descent from Mount Vesuvius shortly after six o’clock, "the guides having neglected to bring their torches in the event of our passing the night."54 The trip excited Julia and Margaret Gardiner, who had defied Neapolitan uneasiness about ladies climbing down to the mouth of the crater. In characteristic lady-like fashion, Juliana had retained her post at the summit and watched disapprovingly. David Gardiner was less constrained by traditional gender roles than his wife. Throughout the trip he tried to expose Julia and Margaret to as many situations as possible.

53Ibid., 83-84
54Ibid., 85.
The tour ended during late summer of 1841 after visits to Amsterdam, Belgium, Scotland, and Ireland. In Amsterdam Margaret noted that she had been too busy for her journal. "Here I am on a continual gallop to keep pace with time. However, there's something satisfactory in the knowledge that I am far in advance of Pa and J[ulia]."55 They had been away for nearly a year, and everyone was becoming anxious to return home. Julia and Margaret were eager for letters from America and news about their brothers and friends. As the time for their return trip approached Margaret wrote, "With such real enjoyment as we have experienced I can never 'Let the dead past bury its dead' be future anticipations as bright as they may be."56 Margaret did not elaborate on Julia's assessment of their trip, but neither would forget the lessons of history. At the very least, impressions of European heads of state helped Julia define her later role as First Lady.

After returning to the United States, they did not remain in East Hampton long before going to Washington. Julia recalled that her father "conceived the idea of a visit to Washington during the session of Congress, thinking that our education would be singularly imperfect if, after seeing the capitals of nearly all the governments of the old world, we should neglect our own."57 January of

---

55 Ibid., 133.

56 Ibid., 136.

1842 was an exciting time for a trip to Washington. While still in Europe they had become interested in events resulting from the death of President William Henry Harrison and arrived home just as the political controversy between President John Tyler and the Whig Party intensified. The controversy promised to make their lesson in government memorable.

Education was not the only facet of the trip to Washington. There was also a social component. David and Juliana hoped to introduce their daughters to prominent government officials and their wives. They intended for the Washington visit to mark Julia and Margaret's formal entry into society. David's goal was clear. He wanted his daughters to develop a network of socially prominent female friends, but more important, he wanted them to marry well. He was happy that Julia had charmed so many prominent European men. By all accounts she was beautiful. Her cousin Mary alluded to Julia's beauty when she wrote that she was "worshipped as a goddess" wherever she went.58

During the train ride to Washington Julia noticed a handsome but portly man entered their car several times. He kept stopping in front of a mirror to adjust his tie while casting "several furtive glances" toward Julia and Margaret. She recalled that his attention excited her interest, and she later discovered that the "handsome stranger was no less a personage than Millard Filmore [sic]," chairman of the House Committee on Ways and Means, "and alas! also married."

The flirtation ended when Julia learned his identity and marital status.\textsuperscript{59} The incident taught her the hazards of flirting with strangers. She also knew that the time had come to develop an adult relationship with a man. She was now ready to behave less impulsively and to take responsibility for her own future.

\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., 195.
II

The Washington Social Season

The Gardiners' first visit to Washington in early 1842 lasted only one month. This trip was principally a fact-finding mission which would enable David and Juliana Gardiner to plan a longer and more methodical excursion for the following winter. While there, acquaintances from New York who customarily spent winters in Washington, told them about the city's constant round of parties and receptions. This trip enabled them to establish a few new social contacts and observe Washington's gay social season which always coincided with winter sessions of Congress. Since the city had no hotels during the 1840s, they found accommodations at Miss Peyton's boarding house on the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Four-and-a-half Street. Miss Peyton's, which served as a popular eating club for important government officials, also gave them intimate exposure to the prominent families who lodged there. The public parlor in the house provided a bird's eye view of the city's elite social life, and the Gardiners liked what they saw. Like other visitors to the city, David and Juliana probably showed their daughters as many landmarks as they could. Whatever their experiences, Washington society whetted their appetites for a longer stay the following winter. In the meantime David and Juliana had several months to prepare Julia and Margaret for a social debut in the nation's capital.

1Seager, 41.
Washington society excited Julia and Margaret so much that neither of them were anxious to return to the quiet life of East Hampton. Although it was a fashionable beach community, the village was very small and remote. East Hampton usually attracted numerous vacationers during the summer, but these visitors meant nothing to them. As a rule, the family avoided the tourists. By July, Julia had become weary of her fairly mundane life at home and was ready for new experiences. She complained:

We have been here stationary nearly five months, dear me! Sometimes I feel dolefully ennuyeé. On some account or other I cannot tell how the interval is not long from morning till night. I generally hail the approach of the latter as in the Land of Dreams I can at least experience variety.

An influx of foreign tourists, who arrived in the village during the summer of 1842, might have provided some local excitement, but they were not fit company for a Gardiner. According to Julia’s local acquaintances, the English and French visitors "indulge too noisily for class no. 1, parading up and down the street at night serenading the moon with a yell as a finale to their songs."3

Except for reading and needlework there was little to keep them busy. When bored, dressmaking and reading proved better than doing nothing at all. But even this kind of entertainment was elusive in East Hampton where suitable sewing supplies and reading materials were always in short supply. Since only the finest fabrics satisfied Julia, she required her brother Alexander to take time away

---


from his city law practice to procure fancy silks from the best shops in Manhattan. "I now wish you to procure [for] me the same quantity of pale pink glacée silk of the hue of the piece of silk enclosed, not a single shade darker." Julia's demands may have made Alexander wish that his sister were still in Europe, especially when she scolded him. After receiving a pair of pink gloves that he sent, she wrote, "I declare I think taste hid herself in your pocket when they were selected." A month later she persisted with testy instructions to her brother. "Now mind Alexander don't you come home without my silk if you stay till Friday." In part, Julia was anxious for sewing supplies because she was preparing garments for her Washington trip.

Although Julia and Margaret both did needlework, the family employed seamstresses to make difficult garments like evening dresses or men's shirts. Nonetheless, they both kept busy with selection of dress styles, color and texture of fabrics, design of decorative accessories, fitting, and supervision of the seamstress. Like their mother, they were very exact in their expectations and often required a dressmaker to tuck the smallest pleat to their specifications. Production of an elegant dress involved almost as much attention from Julia and Margaret as the task required of the seamstress.

Procuring books from a New York City library was another chore entrusted to Alexander. During the late spring Julia and Margaret were anxious for him to

---

5Julia Gardiner to Alexander Gardiner, 15 August 1842. Yale University Press.
6Margaret Gardiner to Alexander Gardiner, 14 June 1842. Yale University Library.
send the latest copy of *Godey's Lady's Book* which contained "a plate of the fashions." Elizabeth Fox-Genovese notes that periodical literature like *Godey's Lady's Book* not only apprised women of the latest dress styles, but also put them in touch with other men and women of their own class. The magazine also contained a variety of articles, many of which stressed the theme of domesticity. The same theme was also prominent in the books that Julia read during the summer of 1842. "Pray get the sequel of Madame d'Arblay [Frances Burney], or if that is not in I am very desirous to read Madame de Sevigné's [Marquise de Sevigné or Marie de Rabutin-Chantal] letters to her daughters." She also requested a copy of *The New World*, which contained Lady [Marguerite] Blessington's "Lottery of Life." Her selection of books was interesting. Madame d'Arblay and Lady Blessington were both romantic novelists who portrayed women as strong independent characters while reinforcing traditional domestic themes. The education of accomplished, elite women was a particularly important theme in the novels of many writers like Madame de Sevigné and Madame d'Arblay. Julia, who was always thoroughly conscious of her own place as an accomplished woman, probably derived a lot of comfort from these works as she prepared for her social debut in Washington. In the letter which requested these books, she hinted that her father had an interest in her reading. After listing her

---

7 Margaret Gardiner to Alexander Gardiner, 14 June 1842. Yale University Library.
9 Ibid.
selection, she added, "Pa says he supposes they must be in that library."\textsuperscript{10} Although David played a major role in her intellectual development, there is no evidence that he ever read any of these novels himself. Perhaps he knew that these authors tried to imbue their readers with strong traditional values like piety, chastity, and self-respect. Reinforcement of such values only guaranteed that Julia and Margaret would represent the Gardiner family well as they made their social debut. At the very least, novel reading helped to keep them entertained during the months before their Washington trip.

They had had enough of reading and sewing by the time winter came and were eager for the gay life of Washington. This time they arrived during the second week in December and stayed until mid-March. Once they had established themselves at Miss Peyton's boarding house, each member of the family sent individual cards which announced their presence to many of the city's rich and powerful families. Nineteenth century Washington protocol required an exchange of formal cards before making visits, and that suited the Gardiners perfectly—the more formal the better!\textsuperscript{11} Even though David and Juliana had few Washington acquaintances they sent numerous cards, and no one was too important to omit from their list. They regarded the highest ranking government officials as their social and economic equals. David was proud of his aristocratic ancestry and had confidence that no one was any better than he. Twenty years had passed since his

\textsuperscript{10}Julia Gardiner to Alexander Gardiner, 15 August 1842. Yale University Library.

\textsuperscript{11}Julia Gardiner to Alexander and David Lyon Gardiner, 13 December 1842. Yale University Library.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
brief service in the New York State Senate, and he still claimed some political
clout, which he hoped to use as an entrée into Washington social circles.

Continuing to use his political title after all those years, he had his calling cards
engraved, "Senator David Gardiner." He intended to do whatever was necessary
to introduce his daughters to Washington society. If flaunting an outdated title
would help, so be it.

The butler James Keating, who had accompanied the Gardiners to
Washington, earned part of his keep by delivering the cards to a list of people that
included President John Tyler, Secretary of State Daniel Webster, and each of the
other cabinet members. Once the Gardiners received reciprocal calling cards they
were free to make their visits. Much to Julia's delight many of the responses
came as quickly as the next day, thus assuring rapid access to Washington society.
David's strategy had worked, and the family planned to begin their calls the
following week.

Securing rooms at Miss Peyton's boarding house was almost as good an
entrée into Washington social circles as sending calling cards. Accommodations
were always in great demand, and the house was small enough to insure close
contact with very well-connected people. Boarders the winter of 1842-43 included
New Hampshire Senator Levi P. Woodbury and his family; New York

---

12 Juliana Gardiner to David Lyon Gardiner, 19 January 1843. Yale University Library.
Also, according to T. H. Breen, *Imaging the Past: East Hampton Histories*, the Gardiner's
claims of aristocratic status are legendary in East Hampton history.

13 Julia Gardiner to Alexander and David Lyon Gardiner, 13 December 1842. Yale
University Library.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Congressman and Mrs. Robert McClellan; South Carolinian Representatives Thomas Delage Sumter and Robert Y. Hayne; and Richard Waldron, a young naval purser.\textsuperscript{14} Other unattached men took meals at Miss Peyton’s house, and they quickly noticed the beautiful young Julia who had inherited much of her father’s self-assurance. Although extremely bright and very outgoing, she enjoyed flirting with men. Her flirtations may have opened more Washington doors than all of her father’s pretensions. Margaret, on the other hand, was far more reserved and lacked Julia’s vivacious personality, yet she was also in great demand by the bachelors of Washington.

When the Gardiner’s began making social calls, cabinet members were at the top of their list. They greatly admired Secretary of State Daniel Webster, and Juliana was especially happy to have been in the parlor when he arrived to leave his calling card. Recognition by high ranking government officials gratified both David and Juliana, who excitedly reported the names of their callers to their sons in New York.\textsuperscript{15} Elated by their situation Juliana later observed, "The society here is quite provincial tho’ a great many collect here of the best in our country & I think it is perhaps the best place for young ladies who wish to mingle in the gaieties of the New World."\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14}Juliana Gardiner to David Lyon Gardiner, 23 December 1842. Yale University Library.

\textsuperscript{15}Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to David Lyon Gardiner, 23 December 1842. Yale University Press.

\textsuperscript{16}Juliana Gardiner to Alexander and David Lyon Gardiner, 27 January 1843. Yale University Library.
Juliana was not quite sure how to respond to the other boarders at Miss Peyton's. Most were anxious to dispense with formalities, and for a brief period, they managed to get her to comply. Always concerned about her daughters' public image, she tacitly gave permission when a few of them insisted on having Julia sing in the parlor. Once the performance had ended, she proudly wrote, "ladies & gentlemen [gathered] in the parlor [on] a rainy night . . . I encouraged her to comply [and was quite] satisfied with the manner in [which] she acquitted herself." Possibly anticipating such an opportunity, Julia had brought her guitar to Washington and provided her own accompaniment. Word of the little concert spread quickly, however, and caused Juliana some uneasiness the next day at the House of Representatives when Julia "was attacked about her singing immediately which was quite unexpected I assure you."\(^1\)

Juliana quickly discovered that she had no control of the social events in the parlor of the boarding house. When Miss Peyton sponsored a Christmas dance and hired a violinist, Juliana had no choice but to join in the fun. Julia reported dancing with a great many beaux, and added: "the old ladies were persuaded to dance too, and how you will laugh! Ma took the floor with Mr. McClellan. Mrs. Woodbury danced in the same cotillion. Ma is coming out almost as gay as her daughters."\(^2\) Julia and Margaret were obviously happy that their mother had loosened up enough to experience a good time herself. But

\(^1\)Juliana Gardiner to David Lyon Gardiner, 19 January 1842. Yale University Library.  
\(^2\)Julia Gardiner to Alexander and David Lyon Gardiner, 27 December 1842. Yale University Press.
with single young men residing at Miss Peyton's house Juliana would not let her guard down too much. The circumstances required a vigilant chaperone, and she took the responsibility seriously.

Male boarders, however, proved the least of Juliana's problems. Her patience with the Woodbury women and Mrs. McClellan quickly frayed. She and David had invested too much time in planning their daughters' Washington debut to permit others to interfere. When callers arrived the Woodbury women and Mrs. McClellan were always present in the parlor, and the Gardiners had no way of knowing which family the visitors wanted to see. Additionally, Julia and Margaret claimed the Woodburys always attempted to monopolize gentleman callers. Leveling a much more serious charge, they insisted that the Woodbury women were envious of the attention they received from the most attractive bachelors in the city. Juliana developed such revulsion for Mrs. Woodbury and Mrs. McClellan that she had her husband secure an additional upstairs room to serve as a private parlor. With customary Gardiner aloofness Margaret laid the matter to rest when she observed, "We did not find the public parlor as pleasant as we anticipated. The ladies not as agreeable, the company not as select."19

The men boarders were much more to Juliana's liking. Two of them did everything in their power to make Julia and Margaret feel at home. Once Thomas Sumter and Richard R. Waldron learned that Julia and Margaret wanted to tour the city and hear Congressional debates, they offered to serve as their

19Margaret Gardiner to Alexander and David Lyon Gardiner, 14 January 1843 and 29 January 1843. Yale University Library.
escorts. Waldron, who was particularly attentive to Julia, had no difficulty retaining her interest when she discovered that he had access to many of the important parlors of the city. In a report to her brothers, she noted:

This morning we passed making calls. Our party, which is divided in two carriages, comprised ourselves and Mr. Waldron. It is the fashion to accept the services of beaux in such cases and Mr. W. has it in his power to be very useful. He is intimately acquainted with all the people of influence here particularly with the President's family & the Websters.20

True to Julia's description of him, Waldron introduced them to anyone they wanted to meet, taking them first to Daniel Webster's home and then to the home of John Quincy Adams where Julia and Margaret left their cards "in accordance with the etiquette which is practiced towards ex-presidents."21

Waldron also escorted them to the Congressional debates which were a major focal point during the Washington social season. In 1843 members of Congress encouraged women spectators to attend their sessions. Their motives were purely social since parties followed many of the evening debates. At first, debate topics were not nearly as important to Julia and Margaret as the experience of being there. In some ways watching the verbal sparring was like watching a sport. Many of the people in the lady's gallery were friends with debaters on both sides of an issue and simply wanted to see the contest, and Julia and Margaret were no different. After Julia's first visit to the House, she

---

20Julia Gardiner to Alexander and David Lyon Gardiner, 27 December 1842. Yale University Press.

21Ibid.
remarked, "They jumped and screamed and perspired and foamed and as usual a much to do about nothing."22

The fiery forensic style of the debaters displayed a kind of hypermasculinity that contradicted the "superior" virtues instilled in the minds of nineteenth century women. Speakers freely used nasty epithets, and tempers flared.23 Feminine virtues were supposed to neutralize such contemptible male passions as those demonstrated by the legislators. Such displays were a new experience for Julia and Margaret who were unable to understand how anything could be important enough to warrant such scenes. They found the debaters' rage appalling.24 Their distaste did not stem from ignorance of contemporary issues. Julia and Margaret actually knew more about current political events than most Americans of their day, but both were indifferent to issues which affected the working class. The 1843 Congressional debate over anti-slavery petitions was certainly a familiar issue for both of them, but again, the question scarcely aroused their concern.

Like many northerners of their day, the Gardiner family had no moral objections to slavery. Both Julia and Margaret had encountered slaves in Washington and viewed them with the same kind of detachment they felt for their white butler James Keating, whom the family released after the Washington trip because he had forgotten his proper station. Julia and Margaret, therefore, came

22Ibid.


24Seager, 183.
to the debate with antipathy for all laboring people—slave or free. When a man of
John Quincy Adams' stature expressed passionate feelings about slavery, they were
unable to understand the depth of his convictions. Slavery was simply not
important to either of them.

The two political combatants, Mr. [John Quincy] Adams and Mr. [Henry]
Wise were pointed out to me and I assume I shall soon have the pleasure
of listening to the war of tongues. They are unsparing in tender epithets,
and I understand nothing but the age of Mr. Adams prevents them oft
times coming to blows on the floor. Mr. A has the reputation of possessing
every sense but common sense.\textsuperscript{25}

When the Speaker ended the debate, people in Ladies' Gallery had difficulty
hearing the members vote. Julia confessed that acoustics and the "rapidity with
which they articulated" votes left her "unwise" as to who voted on either side.
Margaret agreed with Julia's observation about acoustics—"it is difficult to hear
from the galleries all that is said below."\textsuperscript{26} How individual members voted was
unimportant because the outcome was quite clear: repeal of the Gag Rule failed
again in 1843.

Ladies crowded the galleries in both the House and the Senate during the
1843 session, but initially they had only a marginal interest in the proceedings.
Most were present for purely social reasons as their attire demonstrated. So
magnificent were their dresses at evening sessions that many preferred standing in
order to avoid wrinkles. The Gardiner women were no exception. One evening

\textsuperscript{25}Julia Gardiner to Alexander and David Lyon Gardiner, 13 December 1842. Yale
University Press.

\textsuperscript{26}Margaret Gardiner to Alexander and David Lyon Gardiner, January 1843. Yale
University Press.
Juliana dressed in a rich velvet dress (the color was unspecified) with white accessories, while Margaret donned a white dress decorated with silver ornaments. Julia, who also wore white, sported a Greek headdress. Margaret described the ladies' attire as a "perfect display of taste, rich dresses and beauty."27 Attending evening debates was often part of a nighttime agenda that included formal visits and dancing. Women dressed for the parties that followed. In spite of the obvious social reasons for attending Congressional sessions, the overwhelming presence of women in the galleries demonstrated their keen interest in politics. By the end of the Congressional term, Julia and Margaret knew as much about contemporary American politics as any woman in the galleries.

Ironically, they were present in the House of Representatives as John Quincy Adams argued for acceptance of anti-slavery petitions that bore the signatures of many women abolitionists who had no means of gaining access to government.28 As Washington socialites crowded the galleries of Congress less influential women like Dorothea Dix worked tirelessly to gain access to state legislative houses in hopes of bringing about reforms for the mentally ill. The decade of the 1840s was a period of reform movements including women's rights and temperance, but Julia and Margaret had no interest in such things. They were too confident of their own elite status to worry about women's rights. Temperance movements were only a bother which could potentially spoil good

27 Margaret Gardiner to Alexander and David Lyon Gardiner, 14 January 1843. Yale University Press. Margaret failed to note the color of Juliana's velvet dress.

parties—an unthinkable notion for Julia and Margaret who both enjoyed whiskey punch and champagne.\textsuperscript{29} They demonstrated their disapproval of temperance movements by staying away from church when a visiting clergyman delivered three sermons on the subject during the previous summer.\textsuperscript{30}

The political knowledge they acquired had a lasting effect. Constantly surrounded by policy discussions and intrigue during their Washington visit, Julia and Margaret began to identify with the political interests of the men they met. Other women experienced the same thing. Observing the heated debates of 1843 had stimulated their interest in the issues. The result was a Congress packed with women, and many listened attentively to the proceedings. Before the term had ended, women spilled over from the galleries to the floor of the House of Representatives, something Congress had not permitted in years. On "Friday evening," as Margaret reported in early March, "we were admitted without opposition to the floor of the House and occupied seats near [Kentucky Representative Thomas A.] Marshall." Unfortunately, Julia and Margaret proved distracting for those legislators who genuinely wanted to work. "We had no less than twenty-one gentlemen to entertain us during the evening the most agreeable of whom was J. Tyler [John Tyler, Jr., the President's son] and the most agreeable Judge [Justice John] MacClean [McLean]."\textsuperscript{31} Julia and Margaret held court on

\textsuperscript{29}Margaret Gardiner to Alexander and David Lyon Gardiner, 3 February 1843. Yale University Press.

\textsuperscript{30}Margaret Gardiner to Alexander Gardiner, 17 June 1842. Yale University Library.

\textsuperscript{31}Margaret Gardiner to Alexander and David Lyon Gardiner, 7 March 1843. Yale University Press.
the floor of the House until the session adjourned at half past one. Although both
did their share of flirting, they did want to gain better understanding of the
Congressional proceedings. Eventually, both acquired first-rate knowledge of
contemporary government issues. For her part, Julia later became a very astute
politician.

Her escort Richard Waldron could hardly compete with the large numbers
of men she attracted. Juliana had actually feared his presence would lead "on
very slight grounds" to rumors of a wedding engagement, but she had nothing to
worry about.32 Julia's letters named many would be suitors during the
Washington visit, and she set her goals exceedingly high. Margaret noted that
Julia had "resolved to lay siege to Judge McLean."33 Appointed to the Supreme
Court in 1829, McLean's name surfaced as a potential presidential candidate every
four years.34 Wealth and social status were certainly requisites for Julia's
suitors, but the presidency was more a tantalizing possibility. Even the widowed
John Tyler quickly numbered among the possible suitors. Some of the other men,
who anxiously waited in the wings, never stood a chance.

Congressman Richard Davis of Saratoga Springs, New York, met none of
Julia's standards. Truly smitten by his love for her, Davis lost all control of his

32Juliana Gardiner to Alexander and David Lyon Gardiner, 23 December 1842. Yale
University Library.

33Margaret Gardiner to Alexander and David Lyon Gardiner, 7 March 1843. Yale
University Library.

34Robert Remini, Henry Clay: Statesman for the Union (New York: W. W. Norton &
emotions. He no longer slept because he thought about Julia day and night. Foolishly, he would turn up at Miss Peyton's house at unexpected times only to have Julia refuse to see him. Every time the Gardiners arrived at the House of Representatives, Davis hurried to the galleries to visit her. Unwisely, he made frank inquiries about the Gardiner family's social standing and freely told people that he intended to ask for Julia's hand. She had deliberately refrained from flirting with Davis because she did not want to encourage him. Aside from not having presidential ambitions, he was too homely for Julia's taste. Her description was kind. She characterized him as "a rich old bachelor, but . . . not very sentimental looking." Margaret was more blunt. His "requisites are beauty, riches, youth, and family; in return for which he offers a rabbit face with one foot of shirt, collar, comical figure, two front teeth and two hundred thousand dollars."

Another more attractive suitor, Congressman Francis W. Pickens, did not meet the Gardiners' standards either. Unlike Julia's presidential aspirants, Pickens was somewhat younger at thirty-seven years of age. His wife Margaret Eliza had died in August 1842, and he was anxious to find a new wife who could serve as mother to his four daughters. He genuinely hoped to make Julia his

35Julia Gardiner to Alexander and David Lyon Gardiner, 27 December 1842. Yale University Press.

36Margaret Gardiner to Alexander and David Lyon Gardiner, January 1843. Yale University Library.

wife but was never able to make his way into her heart. A well-to-do planter in the South Carolina upcountry, he proposed transforming Julia into the grand mistress of Edgewood plantation, where he would devote himself to her "every wish and desire." She joked about the proposal to her brother Alexander:

And now what will you say if I have chosen to fly for aye to a southern home where flourishes the pomegranates and oranges, where luxury surrounds, and reign queen-like over ever so many niggers and step children. What will you say & think if I have returned a favorable answer and am only waiting the arrival of the elect?

Before concluding the letter she confessed that the thought of marrying Francis Pickens gave her nightmares.38

She responded to Pickens with a clear but gentle refusal. Her words were kind, but she referred to him only in the third person:

He will believe if I possess even to a slight degree the attributes with which he partially has invested me, I cannot but admire and honor one, from whom so much elevation of sentiment proceeds. That I highly and truly value the declaration he has made me, I must in justice to myself assure him, and that no one is more alive to, or can more thoroughly appreciate such refinement of sensibility in another.

Deeply do I regret that I have awakened feelings, which merit so much, where circumstances, it seems vain to mention, place it out of my power to acknowledge the return they so rightly deserve. But I would fain preserve the friendship of Mr. Pickens, and I trust it will be no difficult task thus to change the tone of his consideration. I would not have him eradicate my image entirely from his mind, for I may confess to him that his acquaintance though short, inspired me with the most friendly esteem, and a return of this kindly sentiment would be a source of infinite pride and pleasure to Julia Gardiner.39

Julia's rejection did not leave Pickens heartbroken. He spent most of the summer of 1843 attempting to win the hand of Martha Maria Colhoun, who also rejected

38Julia Gardiner to Alexander Gardiner, 22 May 1843. Yale University Library.

39Julia Gardiner to Francis W. Pickens, 25 May 1843. Yale University Library.
each of his proposals. Finally, Pickens married Marion Antoinette Dearing of Charleston in January 1845. He viewed the marriage as a duty to himself and his daughters, and seldom mentioned Marion to anyone.\(^{40}\) Their union was loveless. Fortunately, Julia had not selected him.

John McLean continued to fascinate Julia as late as March 1843. Like Pickens, McLean was painfully aware of his competition which, by February, included the President of the United States. Ironically McLean used his age as an excuse for stepping aside. At fifty-seven he was thirty-four years older than Julia, but only four years older than John Tyler. Tyler lacked the requisite wealth, but he was a member of a distinguished southern family. More important, he was the most powerful man in the United States, a kind of American version of the kings Julia had met in Europe. A possible liaison with Tyler would serve to insure her own social position.

As a widower with seven mostly adult children, he was an ideal prospect. The last several years had been difficult for Tyler as his wife Letitia's health steadily failed. His son Robert had moved into the White House and brought along an energetic wife, Priscilla Cooper, who assumed duties as the president's hostess. When Letitia finally died, Tyler worked hard to pull his life back together and was now interested in seeing other women. The youthful Julia Gardiner was particularly attractive to him. Their first meeting, which occurred sometime in December 1842, was only a casual encounter, and the second contact did not come until early January, when Thomas Sumter escorted her to a New Year's

\(^{40}\)Edmunds, 91, 128.
party at the White House. As they waited in the receiving line Julia worried whether President Tyler would recognize her after only one brief meeting, but he quickly put her at ease. "He caught sight of us behind some two or three who were shaking him by the hand and immediately exclaimed Miss Gardiner! at the same instant extending his hand with 'I hope you are very well.'"41

Three weeks later Waldron, who was a regular caller at the White House, escorted Julia there for a more intimate meeting with Tyler. This time David and Juliana went along too. Margaret remained at home because of a cold. Priscilla Cooper Tyler, who had previously met the Gardiners at several other social events, was on hand to welcome them. According to Margaret's third hand account of evening, "Julia was delighted at the White House last evening. They were received very cordially and Julia [was] paid a thousand compliments by the President and Mrs. T. [Priscilla]. They say the visitors looked and listened in perfect amazement."42

Washington wags soon began gossiping about Robert Tyler’s frequent visits to Miss Peyton’s boarding house to deliver messages and invitations for his father. Fortunately, Juliana had secured the private parlor two or three weeks before the Gardiner/Tyler courtship began in earnest. Margaret reported, "It quite puzzles the boarders and they see the president's carriage so often at Mrs. Ps door and

41Julia Gardiner to Alexander and David Lyon Gardiner, 6 January 1843. Yale University Library.

42Margaret Gardiner to Alexander and David Lyon Gardiner, 21 January 1843. Yale University Press.
Mr. T so often in our room. They declare the P. is doing business by proxy."43

Of course the White House was no more private than the Gardiners’ quarters. Even when Priscilla carefully screened the guest list, the White House could not prevent gossip about the President entertaining Julia. Their courtship was news, and some guest was sure to let the entire city know. Sometimes Tyler became almost giddy and on one occasion ended the evening by chasing Julia through the White House. Priscilla’s father, Tom Cooper, was present and warned that Tyler’s soirée would appear in the next day’s Globe.44

The president’s relationship with Julia made her and Margaret even more popular among Washington men than before. When Margaret opened their parlor door to greet a gentleman caller one evening, the man could not believe his eyes. Rather than join the crowd, he said he would call again “when all the members of Congress in Washington were not here.” Undaunted, Margaret concluded that he would show up the next day. Some callers wanted to get to know Julia and Margaret better, while others were kind to Julia as a means of winning favors from Tyler. Whatever the reason, the number of gentlemen visiting the Gardiner parlor increased significantly after John Tyler became Julia’s main suitor.

In spite of the attention paid Julia by the President of the United States and other prominent men, Waldron continued to serve as her escort. Whatever his

43Margaret Gardiner to Alexander and David Lyon Gardiner, 15 February 1843. Yale University Library.

44Margaret Gardiner to Alexander and David Lyon Gardiner, 8 February 1843. Yale University Library.
expectations, he seemed content with Julia's friendship. His easy entrée to important homes like that of Postmaster General Charles A. Wickliffe continued to please her. She also wanted to acquire female friends, and the Wickliffe women were among the most hospitable ladies in Washington. Margaret's assessment of them was telling. "They are a very lovely family & have remained long enough at their home in Kentucky not to be easily contaminated by mingling with the worldly Washingtonians."\(^4^5\) Always the southern gentleman, Postmaster General Charles Wickliffe invited Julia and Margaret to use his carriage for social jaunts with his wife and daughters.

The Wickliffes' social circle may have been broader than the Gardiners had bargained for. One invitation caused them some trepidation. The wedding of "the youngest Miss Timberlake," daughter of the well-known Peggy O'Neale Timberlake Eaton, had never factored into any of their Washington plans, yet the Wickliffes expected Julia and Margaret to accompany them in their carriage. Margaret insisted that they would not attend the affair until they received "a favorable account" of the bride's social status. "Previous to her residence in Spain where you know her husband was minister plenipotentiate [sic], it was not very fair."\(^4^6\) The years had actually worked wonders for Peggy Eaton's social standing, and the Gardiner sisters were pleased to learn that Daniel Webster's daughter would serve as an attendant. The presence of prominent government

\(^{4^5}\)Margaret Gardiner to Alexander Gardiner, 21 January 1842. Yale University Library.

\(^{4^6}\)Margaret Gardiner to Alexander and David Lyon Gardiner, 14 January 1843. Yale University Press.
officials at any social event was always reassuring to the class conscious Gardiner family. Margaret reported, "The company was very select and numbered a hundred, not more."47 David and Juliana Gardiner, who wanted their daughters to rub shoulders with better folks than the O'Neale-Timberlake-Eaton family, learned that they could not control every situation.

At twenty-three years old, Julia had not yet refined many of her values and seemed like a spoiled child when compared with her much older suitors. First, she had inherited more than a healthy dose of David Gardiner's aristocratic pretensions. As a result, she was not only confident of her social station, but often viewed herself as superior to her suitors. Second, she was completely self-centered and did all that she possibly could do to establish herself as the reigning belle of Washington by flirting with every eligible bachelor of proper social standing. Men like Richard Waldron were only useful as ornaments in her court. She was still "the Rose of Long Island," who thoroughly enjoyed public attention. But this time she had succeeded in attracting the attention of men as prominent as John McLean and John Tyler.

The 1843 Washington social season concluded when Congress adjourned in March, and not a moment too soon. The intense pace was enough to exhaust anyone older than Julia and Margaret Gardiner. Surprisingly, not even Juliana complained of fatigue, but the family was now ready for a respite at their secluded home in East Hampton. David thought they had spent their time and money well because Julia's social debut was a smashing success that had culminated in a

47 Margaret Gardiner to Alexander Gardiner, 21 January 1842. Yale University Library.
marriage proposal from the President of the United States. They had delayed
leaving the city until Julia and Tyler could come to an agreement about their
future, but when they departed for East Hampton wedding plans were still vague.
Juliana thwarted all attempts to set a wedding date in order to give her daughter
time to sort through her feelings about Tyler. Coming to a decision about
marrying the President of the United States was a serious matter, and she refused
to permit Julia to make a hasty decision, but John Tyler was persistent. Gallant
as always, he proposed either "resigning the Presidential chair or at least sharing it
with J[ulia]."48 Although Tyler had no intention of either resigning or sharing
his office, he was willing to plead with Julia to get her to say yes.

J. J. Bailey, a Gardiner family friend, joked with Julia about her friendship
with Tyler. "I thought mischief must come out of your trip to Washington," he
quipped, "but I did not think it would light on the grey hairs & the venerable brow
of republican majesty himself." Bailey accused her of being accountable for "those
capricious & wayward [political] measures" that widened the gap between the
President and the Whigs, because the "old Gentleman's wits had been strolling on
the heights of Parnassus [rather] than in the White House, where they ought to
be." In an earlier encounter with Bailey, Margaret had hinted of her sister's
Cabinet influence. Now Bailey embellished the idea:

There is wisdom in the Salique [Salic] law, and I cannot say I approve of
petticoat government in the affairs of state. 'Tis quite enough that we are
the veriest [sic] slaves to it in every department of social & domestic life.
He should have bethought him how Antony lost a world for a woman, but I
can forgive his weakness, as I well know he had all of the fascination of a

---

48Margaret Gardiner to Alexander Gardiner, 15 March 1843, as quoted in Seager, 199.
Cleopatra to contend with. His frequent use of the veto power is no longer a mystery, nor is it strange that the tenure of friends & foes in office should be so uncertain, when his favor & good humor hung upon the April smiles of a spoiled & capricious beauty.

He also repeated a rumor that "my fair correspondent" accepted Tyler's marriage proposal on the condition "that the said J. T. should be re-elected for another term & that Madame should wear the crown at least four years." Julia found Bailey's letter amusing and quoted much of it when she wrote to her brother, Alexander. She concluded her account of Bailey's letter by saying, "Pray pardon my unmercifully long extract, but I thought it would amuse you." 49

Julia was very excited with her situation. She had returned to East Hampton in triumph. Her name was on the lips of everyone in the village, and neighbors had innumerable questions about her plans. An old man named William Drayton noted that he understood she would soon go to Washington. Others inquired whether the President would visit during the summer, and indeed Julia had invited him. But John Tyler had enough to do during the summer of 1843 without trying to include a trip to Long Island on his agenda. Residents expressed disappointment that he did not come, but Julia did not. She needed time to ponder the consequences of her decision. Time passed quickly enough,

however, and as summer ended John Tyler looked forward to Julia’s return to Washington.

Personal matters prevented David Gardiner from taking his daughters to Washington until late February 1844.\textsuperscript{50} Juliana remained at home because she had suffered from sick headaches all winter, but her illness had not dampened Julia’s spirits. Once again she was in Washington to engage in gossip with friends she had not seen since the previous winter and to reclaim her position as reigning belle. Immediately she resumed the gay parties and the endless rounds of visits, but the fun ended when her father died four days after their arrival. His death on February 28, resulted from the explosion on the naval frigate \textit{Princeton} that also claimed the lives of Secretary of State Abel Upshur and four others.

John Tyler had given a party that day for about 350 people on board the \textit{Princeton}. The ship featured the latest technological advance in weapons, a large gun called the "Peacekeeper." Crew members demonstrated it several times during the voyage down the Potomac River. At one point a few men hurried on deck to watch another firing of the weapon as the frigate passed Mount Vernon—this time in honor of George Washington. Unfortunately, the gun exploded and propelled metal fragments about the deck. The red hot missiles struck David Gardiner, Secretary of State Abel Upshur, and the others who died. John Tyler was not on deck when the gun exploded, but he instantly made his way to Julia.

\textsuperscript{50}During the early weeks of 1844, David Gardiner made arrangements to move his family from East Hampton to New York City. Plans for the move prevented the family from travelling to Washington earlier in the season.
David Gardiner’s death was a terrible shock for Julia. He was an energetic and youthful fifty-nine year old man, who had always been close by, except during her years in boarding school. His retirement at age thirty-two had afforded him the time to be both father and friend to Julia and Margaret. Since he had focused almost all of his attention on his daughters during the previous four years, his loss left both young women grief-stricken. One month after the accident Julia was still unable to stop thinking about him. In late March she wrote:

For several nights in succession, I have dreamt of my dear, dear Father—Alive and yet dead—I feel his spirit has fled, and still I invariably see him at my side, as in life, with the same sweet smile. How often I try to convince myself it is all a dream and rouse myself in the anticipation of finding it so. Then comes the dreadful reality and I sigh away the night in watching.\(^{51}\)

As Julia attempted to come to grips with her father’s death, she apparently decided to marry as soon as possible.\(^{52}\)


\(^{52}\)Seager, \textit{and Tyler too}, 207.
III

The Auspicious Reign

Julia's decision to marry as quickly as possible delighted John Tyler, but he had to proceed with great caution because of the Gardiner family's bereavement. Her decision also contrasted with nineteenth century norms which limited choices in such matters to the woman's parents and the prospective groom. As Nancy Cott notes, nineteenth century women rarely took the initiative for their own wedding arrangements.\(^1\) Traditionally, mothers made many of the decisions about their daughters' weddings, and Juliana Gardiner had no intention of abdicating her responsibility in this matter. Since John Tyler had not asked for permission to marry Julia prior to David Gardiner's death, he had to gain the consent of Juliana, who was now in mourning.

When he wrote to Juliana Gardiner on April 20, 1844, his letter was brief and to the point.

I have the permission of your dear daughter . . . to ask your approbation of my addresses to her, dear Madam, and to obtain your consent to our marriage which in all dutiful obedience she refers to your decision. May I indulge the hope that you will see in this nothing to object, and that you will confer upon me the high privilege, of substituting yourself in all that care and attention which you have so affectionately bestowed upon her. My position in society will I trust serve as a guarantee for the assurances

which I give, that it will be the study of my life to advance her happiness by all and every means in my power.²

Tyler must have expected a favorable reply, but he could scarcely have guessed that Juliana would express her reservations as candidly as she did.

As a mother, Juliana had never taken her responsibility lightly, and she would not begin now. In response to Tyler's proposal Juliana said that she could think "of no considerations which this world could offer that would make me consent without hesitation and anxiety, to a union so sacred but which death can dissolve." Juliana had strong views about almost everything, but on the topics of marriage and religion she was particularly outspoken. Over the years she had conveyed these values to Julia and was willing to defer to her daughter's best judgment. Juliana was, however, unwilling to defer to Julia on the next point. Tyler had noted his position in society, but that did not prevent her from expressing concern about his financial standing. In spite of his political prominence, she wanted assurance that he could afford to support Julia according to Gardiner family standards. Juliana was blunt in her reply:

Julia in her tastes and inclination is neither extravagant nor unreasonable tho' she has been accustomed to all the necessary comforts and elegancies of life. While she remains in the bosom of my family they can be continued to her. I have no reason to suppose but you will have it in your power to extend to her the enjoyments by which she has been surrounded and my reference to the subject arises from a desire to obviate all misunderstanding and future trial.³

²John Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 20 April 1844. Yale University Library.
³Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to John Tyler, 22 April 1844, as quoted in Seager, 3.
Robert Seager notes that Juliana had an "uncanny ability to penetrate to the core of practical economic realities."^4

Juliana’s frank comments put Tyler in a difficult situation. Yet, as surprising as her letter may have been, he had no intention of changing his mind. Tyler accepted the conditions of the letter because he loved Julia and wanted to give her every luxury that he could afford. Wealth was an important consideration, but it was not everything. In the end, Juliana agreed to permit the marriage in spite of Tyler’s financial standing. After all he was the President of the United States, and his reputation was just as important as financial worth. Juliana would not, however, have any part of a large public celebration during her period of mourning. News of even the smallest wedding ceremony involving the President of the United States would attract numerous spectators, and she did not want that. The only alternative was to keep all wedding plans secret. On this point Juliana required her four children to refrain from divulging the secret to their friends.

On June 26, 1844, Bishop Benjamin Treadwell Onderdonk of the Episcopal Diocese of New York performed the wedding at the Church of the Ascension on Fifth Avenue and Tenth Street. The church was near the Manhattan residence used by the Gardiners when they were in the city.\(^5\) Two days later,

---

4Ibid.

5"Marriage of the President of the United States," Public Ledger (Philadelphia), 27 June 1844, 2.
Alexander Gardiner, who assumed much of the responsibility for making the arrangements for his sister’s marriage, marvelled about the success of the secret:

At the corners of the streets, in the public places & every drawing room it is the engrossing theme. The whole affair is considered one of the most brilliant coups . . . ever enacted; and I cannot but wonder myself that we succeeded as well in preserving . . . the President’s dignity and our own feelings from all avoidable sacrifice.6

Julia noted that, "the secrecy of the affair is on the tongue and the admiration of everyone. Everyone says it was the best managed thing they ever heard of."7

While Julia’s wedding lifted the family’s spirits, their friends in East Hampton did not know how to react. Those who called to congratulate Juliana on her daughter’s marriage found her mourning attire somewhat disconcerting. She told Julia that they did "not know whether to congratulate me upon your marriage or sympathize with me for your loss. They wear very long faces & think I have met with a great loss." The wedding did help Juliana to forget her own mourning. "My mind has been so absorbed with you," she wrote, "that the idea never occurred to me until this morning at the breakfast table . . . that I had a son [who is] President of the United States."8

Julia, on the other hand, fully appreciated her new position. Six days after the wedding, she described her new situation to her mother:

This is the earliest opportunity I have had to write since my accession . . . Such a time as we have had, since I first placed my foot in the railroad

---

6 Alexander Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 14 June 1844. College of William & Mary.

7 Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 30 June 1844. College of William & Mary.

8 Juliana Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, n.d. 1844. Yale University Library.
cars, defies the powers of any pen to describe. Wherever we stopped, wherever we went, crowds of people, overtopping one another, came to gaze at the President's bride. Never was there such a general expression of interest. Besides a night in Philadelphia, we staid [sic] five hours at Baltimore, and then dropped into Washington almost accidentally, for the city was totally taken by surprise. We bring the information ourselves. An instant [after our arrival] the news flew like wild-fire over the city. Mrs. Semple [a White House hostess] was alone made aware of our coming and she received us. She has left, and I have commenced my auspicious reign, and am in quiet possession of the Presidential Mansion.

At six o'clock I had to appear on the balcony, it being music afternoon, and go through some more introductions. Throughout, everything has been very brilliant, brilliant to my heart's content, as much so as if I were actually to be Presidentess for four more years to come. My high estate has been thus far altogether pleasant to me.9

As she began her "auspicious reign," Julia was quick to recognize that her new position entailed some degree of power. Even during the early nineteenth century, First Ladies had extraordinary influence among important political men. If she had not made this discovery on her own, ambitious men clamoring to win presidential favor, would have apprised her of this. Alexander Gardiner also recognized his sister's new prominence and believed she could play an important role in both his own and John Tyler's political future. At the time of their marriage, Tyler had hopes of running for re-election as a third party candidate, and Alexander hoped to enter politics either through political appointment or election.

Julia's first involvement in presidential politics resulted from family prodding that she advise the President on patronage appointments in New York. Within two days of the marriage, Alexander wrote:

9Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 30 June 1844. College of William & Mary.
I trust that the President will be inquisitive respecting the politicians here & wary of his appointments. We know that there are many in high stations here now . . . who by no means command the respect and consideration of the community. But all of this, between us. I should be very sorry to see such a man as John F. Morrill for instance appointed District Attorney. There are many, very many vastly better & more respectable.  

A few days later, Julia assured him that Tyler would not appoint John Morrill.  

Soon Alexander sparked his mother’s interest in patronage when he informed her that "Uncle Nat" (Nathaniel Gardiner) hoped to obtain appointment as postmaster of the Brooklyn Post Office. Juliana also became aware of numerous family acquaintances who planned to write to Julia in hopes of obtaining political appointments for their friends. Within the first few weeks of her residency in Washington, Julia received so many applications and petitions for jobs from friends and acquaintances that she reported, "I am sometimes quite annoyed." But not all of the petitioners irritated her. When Mrs. John D. Gardiner from Sag Harbor sent "a note and newspapers containing poetry," to promote her son Samuel L. Gardiner's (a distant cousin of Julia’s) application for collectorship, Julia told her mother, "I really think her son deserves the Collectorship quite as much as Henry T. Dering, who has never immortalized me in rhyme."  

---

10Ibid.  
11Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 30 June 1844. College of William & Mary.  
12Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 9 July 1844. Yale University Library.  
13Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 22 July 1844. College of William and Mary.
wrote a sober reply in which she expressed concern for Dering, who was a poor man but of excellent character:

When you wrote rather advocating the appointment of Gardiner on account of his politics Alexander went to Sag Harbor and there met your Uncle Samuel of whom he enquired as [to] the capabilities of G. for the office. Your Uncle states it would be for the interest of the Tyler party to keep Dering in as he was [a] quiet politician & generally popular.14

Julia continued to receive letters by the hundreds from people who needed special favors. Esther Gibbons, an old schoolmate and former friend of the First Lady, wrote "to ask whether in your large and extensive circle . . . you know of any family who are in need of an instructress for their children, one to whom you could recommend me and my services." Gibbons was having a difficult time financially, and her thoughts "naturally recurred to my happier days and friends of yore. And I felt that time could not much change such hearts as your own."15

Mary Livingston of Long Island was upset because her husband had received naval orders requiring him to board the *Preble* which would depart within a few days for the coast of Africa. Livingston, who was either ill or pregnant, did not want her husband to depart for another five months. She, therefore, petitioned Julia to have the President intervene in the situation.16

Juliana Gardiner was unhappy to learn that some petitioners were "condemned criminals" who wanted the First Lady to use her influence to obtain Presidential pardons. "You must not

14Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 3 September 1844. Yale University Library.
15Esther M. Gibbons to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 13 July 1844. College of William & Mary.
16Margaret Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 14 July 1844. College of William & Mary.
read them," Juliana objected; "do leave all business of this kind to the President. It
is a most fearful responsibility." Most requests, however, came from job
seekers. No matter what the nature of the requests were, letters from
desperate people needing special favors helped Julia to mature and understand
the more practical side of politics.

Unfortunately, Julia and Alexander did not always make the wisest choices
as they attempted to reward Long Island Tylerites. They sometimes ran afoul of
the split between Locofoco Democrats and Van Burenites as they attempted to
place distant relatives and friends into lower level government posts. A good
example was Julia’s preference for Samuel L. Gardiner for the Sag Harbor
Collectorship. When Van Burenites discovered Gardiner had won the special
favor of John and Julia Tyler, they conspired to discredit Gardiner as an anti-Tyler
man. The administration subsequently abandoned support of Samuel Gardiner
and unknowingly nominated one of the conspirators in his place. Julia and
Alexander suddenly had a taste of the less savory side of politics. More
important, they had to share the embarrassment of the situation with the
President.

In late August 1844 Julia was particularly pleased when one of Margaret’s
former teachers requested a diplomatic post. This request gave her the
opportunity to do a favor for someone she had long admired:

---

17 Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, undated. Yale University Library.
18 Seager, 249.
19 Seager, 272-275.
One appeal has been made of me of late which I thought it really worth while to pay attention to. I received a very strong letter from Mr. Guillet entreating me to use my influence for him for the sake of his helpless little family, who would be brought to pray for Miss Julia Gardiner whose likeness they had loved so often to gaze upon. The appointment he desired was a Consulship somewhere which would give him standing to enter into commercial arrangements with this country. I assure you I did not hesitate to act. I gave his letter and his whole history to the President, who was pleased with his manner & intelligence. The result will be that Guillet through me altogether receives a Consulship, but I do not intend to give him such a choice one as Marseilles.

Although touched by his request, she did have limits. Julia could favor someone far more special than Guillet with the post at Marseilles and would not lightly dispense such a sought after post.

The Gardiner family quickly applied pressure to remind Julia of her brother's need for a political boost. Although Alexander had clearly informed Julia of his ambitions, Margaret believed she needed an extra prod. "Recollect that A. too would like to have you make hay for him while the sun shines." By September, Alexander had indicated that he was interested in that Consulship in Marseilles. But through her mother Julia advised Alexander of the importance of this particular post, and the disadvantage of having close ties to the President. "It has no salary and the perquisites [sic] amount to 12 or 1300 dollars a year and to make it truly profitable he must be connected in commercial business. It would

---


21Margaret Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 8 July 1844. College of William & Mary.
then be very lucrative, [but] Alex must run the chance of rejection by the Senate." Julia's final point may have dissuaded him because Tyler had grave difficulty getting the Senate to confirm appointments to important posts during 1844.

Patronage jobs did not occupy all of Julia's time during the early months of her marriage. Like most newly married women, she enjoyed the time she spent alone with her husband, and at times, attempted to occupy as much of Tyler's time as possible. In a July 1844 letter to her mother, Julia wrote, "The P. bids me tell you the honeymoon is likely to last forever, for he finds himself falling in love with me every day." Julia's feelings about Tyler were equally strong. Initially, she commanded so much of his time that Tyler was unable to do his work. Several days after the wedding, Margaret Gardiner became alarmed by the constraints which Julia had placed on the President's time. Still serving as a companion of her newly married sister, Margaret concluded that Julia needed to modify her behavior.

Julia was very affectionate and did not seem to care who saw her hug or kiss Tyler. After witnessing one too many kisses Margaret decided "a little sage advice" was necessary. "I told you about assuming household duties as well as those of state. You spend so much time kissing, things of more importance are

---

22Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 8 September 1844. College of William & Mary.

Alice Tyler also observed that her father and Julia "lived together on dreams and kisses."\(^\text{25}\) Nineteenth century norms dictated restraint, particularly for a First Family, but Julia and Tyler often seemed to forget the dignity of their station. When Margaret returned to East Hampton in July, she alerted her mother to the problem, and Juliana quickly responded:

> The President complains you won't go to bed nor get up, nor let him work. This is a bad account of proceedings. If you were a better politician, you would give no occasion for such a complaint. Let your husband work during all business hours. Business should take the precedence [over] caressing. Reserve your caressing for private leisure hours & be sure you let no one see it unless you wish to be laughed at. You see I think you need a lecture from all I hear.\(^\text{26}\)

She reminded Julia of a New York couple, who were indiscreet enough to caress in public. "Did you admire it in Mr. & Mrs. Sampson? How much less, then, in the dignified station in which you are placed."\(^\text{27}\)

Julia could only look to the example of her parents as role models for her own marriage. Juliana and David may have kept their affectionate moments private, but Julia had no memory of her father ever leaving the household for long periods of time or letting business matters take precedence over time spent with his wife. As long as she could remember, David had always been available to his wife, and she expected the same from her husband. David and Juliana Gardiner's

\(^{24}\)Margaret Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 8 July 1844. College of William & Mary.

\(^{25}\)Seager, 246.

\(^{26}\)Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, n. d. July 1844 College of William & Mary. A copy of this letter is also in the Gardiner Family Papers at Yale University Library.

\(^{27}\)Ibid.
marriage had seemed to fit the definition of companionate marriage, and that was
the model by which Julia wanted to define her own marriage. Although
completely devoted to his wife, John Tyler had a job to do and needed to divide
his time between Julia and the affairs of the nation.

A companionate marriage is one based on genuine friendship and mutual
sexual satisfaction. While nineteenth century conventions did not permit Julia
to record information about her sexual relationship with John Tyler, the evidence
does suggest that they developed strong and enduring respect for one another
during their first summer of marriage. While still in Washington, Margaret noted
that "they prove quite a loving pair." John Tyler found himself falling more in
love with Julia each day, and Julia noted that "every moment is occupied either by
the President's presence or in the arrangement of little affairs." She wanted
all of John Tyler's time for her own enjoyment.

Near the end of the first week of Julia's marriage, Margaret reported that
her sister had problems getting out of bed in the mornings. The excitement of the
last two weeks had left her exhausted, and she lacked the energy to assume many
of her new duties. When morning visitors arrived at the White House in hopes of
meeting the First Lady, they were often disappointed because Julia did not make

28Christina Simmons, "Companionate Marriage and the Lesbian Threat," *Frontiers* IV
(1979), 54.

29Margaret Gardiner to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 2 July 1844. College of William
& Mary.

30Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, July 1844 [specific date unknown].
College of William & Mary.
an appearance. Several mornings people paid calls, and she would not go
downstairs to receive any of them. According to Margaret, Julia intended to
receive visitors only twice a week.31

A few days later Juliana expressed her disappointment that Julia had not
foresworn her bad habits. She informed both Margaret and Julia that "the
President . . . must insist upon amendment."32 Margaret also scolded Julia.
"Only exert yourself a little more, for truly you are as easy as a passenger. It is
full time you had descended to the kitchen and taken a survey of the larder, and
shown more interest in your new home."33 Juliana also wanted Julia to assume
more of a domestic role at the White House. In 1844 the presidential residence
was shabby and in clear need of renovations. Reports had filtered out to Juliana
that the place was not particularly clean and needed the care of a vigilant wife.
As a result, Juliana urged Julia to adopt the "practice of early to bed and early to
rise as a general rule." She continued her admonishment by saying, "No
household is well conducted where the head slumbers & sleeps."34

Throughout the first two weeks of Julia's marriage, Juliana continued to
have grave concerns about her daughter's domestic skills. When another relative

31 Margaret Gardiner to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 2 July 1844. College of William
& Mary.

32 Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Margaret Gardiner and Julia Gardiner Tyler, 5 July
1844. College of William & Mary.

33 Margaret Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 8 July 1844. College of William & Mary.

34 Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 5 July 1844. College of William
& Mary.
visited the White House and carried a report back to East Hampton, she again voiced concern:

Elizabeth gives an agreeable account of her visit to Washington . . . [but] says you have a dirty house there. I think the President should make the government clean it forthwith. I would have it perfectly clean if nothing more. You know I detest a dirty house. Commence at once to look around & see that all things are orderly & tidy. This will amuse & occupy you & then it will be so much more comfortable. 35

Juliana fully expected her daughter to assume domestic responsibility for the White House, but Julia had little interest in becoming housekeeper of the Presidential mansion.

Although she had received an introduction to domesticity both at home and at Madame Chegaray's, her parents had not emphasized that aspect of her life during the six years that preceded her marriage to John Tyler. Instead they had invested both energy and money in showing her the world outside of the domestic sphere. Now she was far more interested in politics and the gay social life of the capital than the kitchen of the Presidential mansion. Enjoying the role of president's wife was a priority, because she knew that the experience was a fleeting one. Tyler had apprised Julia of his intention to abandon his third party reelection plans, and she had grimly accepted the news. Now she had to make every moment count and could not waste her time in the White House kitchen. There were more appealing domestic duties like serving as her husband's trusted friend, hostess, and political aide.

35Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, n.d. 1844. Yale University Library.
One immediate domestic role thrust upon Julia was that of stepmother. Except for two teenagers, all of John Tyler’s children were adults. At age fourteen Tazwell was the youngest and did not command a lot of Julia’s attention. Alice was seventeen years old, and she already had begun to regard herself as a woman. Julia was hardly ready to become mother to two teenagers, and Alice was not anxious to have a replacement for her own mother. During the early weeks of the marriage the relationship between Julia and Alice was both awkward and painful. She perceived a lack of attention from her father and resented Julia, who was the new object of his affection. Juliana Gardiner understood the problem well and defended Alice:

I think Alice had much reason to feel neglected & in my opinion should be treated by her father with much affectionate consideration. She is too old to require much particular care from you, but I hope you will be amiable to each other. Of course she will be more of a companion to you than anything else. Your situation with regard to her may be trying to you [...] Of course much will depend on her disposition. You should encourage the most affectionate treatment on the part of her father towards her. Do not allow her young heart to feel parental coldness. No blessing could attend it. I am sure your own good feeling will suggest everything proper upon this subject.37

There was a temporary truce between them, and problems began to diminish. According to Seager, Alice took her place as a member of Julia’s

---

36During the period from 1844 to 1848, Tazwell name does not appear in Julia’s letters. Robert Seager reports that Julia and Tazwell Tyler had a very good relationship, but provides no evidence for his conclusion. Absence of Tazwell’s name from Julia’s letters is curious because she usually reported information about all members of the family.

37Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 1844 [specific date unknown]. Yale University Library.
"court" and gained a strong sense of independence. At twenty-four, Julia was only seven years older than her stepdaughter and lacked any preparation for parenting a teenager. Guiding Alice, who was more like a peer than a daughter, was particularly difficult. She was unwilling to accept advice from Julia graciously, and some tension between the women increased after the President's retirement.

Another domestic concern that Julia quickly identified as one of her new responsibilities was that of doctoring family medical ailments. Traditionally women have assumed this responsibility and many have shown a talent for combining love, gentle nursing care, and the application of a variety of both natural and synthetic medications. Juliana Gardiner had always fashioned herself as the Gardiner family health expert, and Julia almost instinctively imitated her mother when John Tyler did not feel well. The point that Julia missed, however, was her mother's great respect for trained practitioners and her dependence on them for informal consultation.

In September, John Tyler suffered a brief illness, and Julia sprang into action. She wanted to cure him but simply lacked adequate knowledge about medications. When she informed Juliana of the situation, her mother promptly replied in her usual forthright tone. She thought Julia was taking a tremendous risk which could lead to serious harm. "Let me caution you against deeming yourself too efficient in the way of medical skills. I think you are wrong." Juliana advised leaving the matter to the President's "physician, who is probably better acquainted with his constitution than you can be. I do not like to hear of your

38Seager, and Tyler too, 302.
taking any unnecessary responsibility." She over-reacted. Tyler was not so much in awe of Julia as to lose his wits and consume remedies that he had never tried before.

Juliana also worried that Julia would not make wise choices about her own health. She was not unlike other parents who fret about the well-being of their adult children, but her own constant medical complaints and medical advice only inspired a similar focus in her daughter's life. When she wrote of her anxiety over Julia's health in 1844, this was only the beginning of a long stream of such expressions of concern. "I fear you are taxing the powers of nature quite too severely & laying the foundation for much future indisposition & suffering."

Advising Julia to reserve herself more and to see less company, Juliana instructed: "Do not allow yourself to become too much excited," for proper rest is "necessary to the preservation of your health."40

While in the White House, Julia did not complain about her own health. Instead new found responsibilities prevented her from focusing too much on herself. One major distraction involved planning renovations for Walnut Grove, the Virginia estate John Tyler had purchased after the death of his first wife. The 1,200 acre Charles City County plantation was on the banks of the James River. The county had been the boyhood home of John Tyler, and his attraction to the quiet riverside estate was natural. His decision to settle there is harder to explain.

39Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 3 September 1844. Yale University Library.

40Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 1844 [specific date unknown]. Yale University Library.
The county was a Whig stronghold, and some of its leading planters signed a petition on August 18, 1842 to officially repudiate him. Hill Carter, owner of Shirley Plantation and a Whig leader, was chief among Tyler's critics. Charles City County voted Whig in every presidential election from 1836 through 1852. Aside from the hostile political atmosphere, the county did not have the best farming land in the state. Years of tobacco cultivation had depleted soil fertility and forced some planters to seek new land in the lower South.\textsuperscript{41} Now the area's main crops were wheat and corn. Even so, Charles City County remained a county of planters and slaves.

Collier Minge sold Tyler the plantation for $10,000 in 1842. Renovations had progressed very slowly since the purchase, but now the house needed to be ready by his retirement in March, 1845, and Julia was anxious about the quality of the work. Tyler had planned many structural improvements on the house before marrying, but Julia requested some changes. She did not believe a presidential family could live in a house that was not elegant. She would have preferred building a new house, but short of that, she had every intention of this becoming one the "handsomest places in the country."\textsuperscript{42}

John Tyler happily deferred to many of Julia's suggestions after she demonstrated her interest in the project. When Julia first saw the house, it was


\textsuperscript{42}Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 13 July 1844. College of William and Mary.
not equal to some of the exquisite neighboring plantation houses.\textsuperscript{43} She confided her initial disappointment to her mother but resolved to make it "as pleasant as I can under the circumstances."\textsuperscript{44}

While John Tyler was happy to concede many of the decisions about additions and alterations of the house to Julia, he did not permit her to select a new name for the estate. Before their marriage he had decided to call his home Sherwood Forest, and Julia later objected. Arguing that the title was not "sufficiently original," she suggested "Forest Home" instead. But Tyler would have no part of her suggestion. In her quest for a better name, she attempted to enlist help from her family. "Do all of you think about it and propose some names to me to select from."\textsuperscript{45} Juliana avoided the issue. Although she rarely passed an opportunity to give advice, she decided not to interfere.

Work on the house progressed slowly, but John and Julia visited frequently enough to insure that the progress met their expectations. Genuinely an amateur decorator, Julia amazed the head carpenter with her knowledge about house building. Although the source of this knowledge is unclear, she did have good taste and a strong sense of what she wanted. According to Julia, "The President


\textsuperscript{44}Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 13 July 1844. College of William & Mary.

\textsuperscript{45}Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 22 August 1844. Tyler Papers. Library of Congress.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
acknowledged [that] I understand more about carpentering & architecture than he did, and would leave all the arrangements . . . entirely to my taste.\textsuperscript{46}

Julia's plans for Sherwood Forest extended far beyond the building itself. She wanted the surrounding property to be as picturesque as possible. One of the important considerations was a piazza where family and friends could gather in the evenings as the sun set. She also planned to transform a twenty-five acre grove of trees into a park and stock it with deer. Julia hoped the prospect of deer hunting at Sherwood Forest would provide recreation for both her husband and her brother David, while providing a beautiful natural area to grace the estate.

She assigned Juliana and Margaret the task of travelling to New York City to select furniture and other household goods for Sherwood Forest. Julia's expectations were high; she required high quality products and wanted them shipped as quickly as possible. As March approached Julia realized that she had little time to transform Sherwood Forest into a home, and some decisions became fairly urgent. Whether to paint the new interior walls at Sherwood or to use a delicate but highly polished wall paper was a major consideration about which she sought Juliana's advice. Relieved that Julia had at last directed some of her energies to the domestic sphere, her mother and sister did all they could to aid her with the selection and purchase of household decorations.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{46}Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 13 July 1844. College of William & Mary.

\textsuperscript{47}Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 22 July 1844. College of William & Mary.
Although there is no evidence to suggest that Julia took the initiative for renovations at the White House, the Presidential Mansion also got a badly needed face-lift. While the First Family vacationed at Old Point Comfort during late July, carpenters, bricklayers and a cleaning crew rapidly worked to refurbish the White House. Julia happily reported that the place would be in "apple-pie order" by the time they returned to Washington, but she took no credit for the work at the Presidential mansion.\textsuperscript{48} In any case, they did not have much longer to live in Washington, and the condition of the White House continued to be a low priority item for her.

Julia did, however, deserve praise for making White House receptions as elegant as possible. She was careful to consult with two former presidential hostesses when planning official parties. Not only did she maintain good rapport with Priscilla Cooper Tyler, who had served as Tyler's hostess prior to his remarriage, but she also regarded Dolley Madison as one of her mentors. At age seventy-six Dolley Madison, who still loved a good party, became one of Julia's most trusted friends. She had been a guest aboard the Princeton when David Gardiner lost his life and had comforted Julia during those painful moments following the tragedy. The two women renewed their friendship during the summer of 1844, and Dolley was on hand for one of Julia's first White House

\textsuperscript{48}Ibid.
dinner parties. The two women became such good friends that they planned to travel to New York together in the fall of 1844.

Where elegance was involved, Julia needed little inspiration from either Priscilla Cooper Tyler or Dolley Madison. Unwilling to drive about Washington except in the most elaborate carriage, she also wanted her drivers to be elegantly appointed. The solution was to dress her coachman and footman in new livery which consisted of "black suits with black velvet bands & buckles on their hats." Julia's efforts brought a fresh new appearance to John Tyler's household which had been drab and somewhat uninviting during his first three years in the White House. She added excitement that had been absent during Letitia Tyler's illness and the subsequent years when Priscilla served as the widowed President's hostess.

Julia possessed both the charm and requisite enthusiasm for assisting Tyler with the last important crusade of his presidency. Near the end of her life, she recalled the beginning of her marriage and noted that she "immediately became interested in the great political topic of the day"—the annexation of Texas. She was well aware of John Tyler's political difficulties and recognized Texas as a potential boon for the beleaguered President. Helping her husband succeed with

---

49 Julia Gardiner Tyler to Margaret Tyler, 22 August 1844. Library of Congress.

50 Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 8 September 1844. College of William & Mary.

51 Ibid.

this project was far more important than any pressing domestic responsibility. Julia decided to use all of her influence and most of her energy to aid the crusade to bring Texas into the Union.

There is little evidence of Julia’s direct involvement in the President’s push for annexation, but she did use White House receptions as a means of promoting Tyler’s goals. Presidential invitations to key Senators and Congressmen to visit the White House prior to major floor votes was a means of political persuasion, and no one hosted a better reception than Julia. Seager notes that White House receptions gave her the opportunity to transform political events into occasions of regality and charm. She spared no effort in her attempts to make Presidential receptions equal the royal affairs she had attended during her European tour.

Some of Tyler’s critics also recognized Julia as an asset. Many years later she recalled one newspaper verse that bore the stamp of Whig opponents, who often denigrated Tyler by referring to him as "the captain."

Texas was the captain's bride.
Till a lovelier one he took;
With Miss Gardiner by his side,

---

53Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 6 December 1844, in Letters and Times of the Tylers, Vol. 2, 358. Robert Seager also recognized Julia’s enthusiastic involvement in the Texas cause but concluded that she flirted with Congressmen in her husband’s behalf. Although nineteenth century American women often admitted to flirting, the First Lady’s candor and influence seemed sufficient for the Texas crusade. Seager, 248-249.

54Seager, 248-249.

55In 1841 Henry Clay ridiculed those who would form a third party around John Tyler as men unable to gather enough recruits to form a respectable corporal’s guard. A few days later Whig Congressman John M. Botts of Virginia accused Tyler of political treachery and added to the ridicule by writing that the Whigs would “Head Captain Tyler or die.” The remark angered Tyler, but the title “Captain” persisted. Robert V. Remini, Henry Clay: Statesman for the Union (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991), 593-594.
Congressmen and their wives usually enjoyed inclusion at White House receptions, and John Tyler knew that he could not go wrong with Julia at his side.

Helping Tyler campaign for reelection would have been much more to Julia's liking than pushing for the annexation of Texas. Julia enjoyed her role as First Lady and regretted that her "reign" in Washington would be so brief, but she did not complain about John Tyler's decision not to seek reelection. Privately, the Tylers were realists. John Tyler had planned to run on a pro-Texas treaty independent ticket, if neither Democrats nor Whigs nominated a candidate who favored immediate annexation. Southern Whigs did everything in their power to cast him as a villain, and southern Democrats were skeptical. Andrew Jackson wrote supportive letters enabling Tyler's graceful return to the party, but few Democrats viewed him as a viable political candidate. When the Democratic Party selected James Polk, a third party candidacy was no longer necessary or Winnable. Nonetheless, the Gardiners continued to analyze the political trends in New York City and report their opinions to Julia.

Deciphering New York politics during the 1840s was a challenge. The Irish immigrant population had triggered a strong nativist movement that swept through city politics. Nativists gravitated to the Whigs because Irish voters favored Democrats. Many native-born Democrats resented the Irish because they


competed for political favor. Sometimes party lines blurred as Whigs and Democrats worked together to thwart the Irish.\textsuperscript{58} Julia focused her attention on news articles that mentioned John Tyler. Often her reports contained remarks like: "Whig papers do not appear to know how to be bitter enough. John [A.] King in a speech in Ulster County called . . . John Tyler poor, fallen & disgraced. Hugh Maxwell has come out against Texas in a public address."\textsuperscript{59} John A. King was a wealthy New York politician who rose to prominence within the Whig party in 1845.\textsuperscript{60} He could not heap enough criticism on Tyler. In December 1844 Julia advised her brother Alexander to "write always freely to the President about all you see and hear."\textsuperscript{61} The Gardiner-Tyler clan carefully scanned the newspapers in search of both favorable and hostile references and responded when they could. John Tyler had too many political enemies to expect newspapers to treat him well. He knew that he could not win the presidency in 1844, but that did not stop Julia from attempting to advance his position.

During the summer of 1843, Julia had three objectives. First, she wanted to salvage Tyler's political reputation. Antebellum wives were protective of their husbands, and Julia wanted to do whatever she could to rescue him from harsh criticism. Second, she hoped to use her own influence to help her brother


\textsuperscript{59} Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 1844 [specific date unknown]. Yale University Library.

\textsuperscript{60} Spann, 215.

\textsuperscript{61} Julia Gardiner Tyler to Alexander Gardiner, 8 December 1844. Library of Congress.
Alexander to gain political office, and with less than a year left in the White House, she had to work quickly. Finally, she wanted to travel to the North and experience the attention and the acclaim usually afforded to First Ladies. Unfortunately, she had an exaggerated view of her own importance. There was little hope of swaying public opinion in New York City, if newspapers were not interested. Getting the attention of the press was not easy because nineteenth century journalists had little interest in the travels of a First Lady. The only alternative was to have her mother place news items. Before leaving for New York, she wrote, "Can't you get it into the New York papers that Mrs. President Tyler is coming to town accompanied by Mrs. Ex-President Madison, the Secretary of War & Lady?" Alexander would not benefit from Julia's presence if the public did not know that she was in the city.

Alexander was on a city-wide ballot as Democratic candidate for state assembly, but there were problems. Nativism had already resulted in the formation of the highly organized American Republican Party in New York. Alexander's chances of winning were not good, but Julia was hopeful. She looked forward to the fall elections and believed November would be a time of vindication for John Tyler's policies. The Gardiners and Tylers strongly supported the presidential candidacy of James K. Polk, and his victory over Henry Clay would permit Tyler to retire to the James River in peace.

---

62Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 8 September 1844. College of William & Mary.
By 1844 national politics generated more interest than it had in the past. Richard P. McCormick notes that party formation had taken place throughout the nation by 1840, and "voter participation surged upwards to new levels in every state. Throughout the nation nearly four-fifths voted." Men and women reacted to political campaigns with interest. Alexander's campaign was especially exciting for Julia, who noted, "You would not believe what a subject for thought politics is now with me." Juliana was just as excited as Julia. Politics had become part of their daily lives. In Julia's words: "I live in its element and the excitement is immense." As the president's wife, Julia could hardly escape politics, but she misinterpreted her own role in the government. Julia's tendency to use royal terms was unmistakable. She wanted to use her "queen-like" influence to aid job seekers or to promote her husband's political agenda.

As the November elections drew near, Julia became increasingly anxious about her brother's campaign. In early November, she confessed to being in "an uneasy state . . . to know the result of Alexander's ticket." In New York City, the coalition of nativists and Whigs rallied to prevent his election. Alexander's impeccable integrity and family ties to John Tyler did not help him win in a city where James K. Polk soundly defeated Whig candidate Henry Clay. One of his

---


64Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 7 November 1844. Library of Congress.

problems resulted from a lack of sound support from Tammany Hall politicians, who had only grudgingly consented to the nomination of this former Whig. John Tyler and his son Robert had pulled strings to secure Alexander's nomination, and some old-line Democrats resented having his name on the ballot.66

Although Alexander's defeat was a tremendous disappointment for Julia, she was able to bask in the success of James K. Polk. As news of presidential election returns trickled into Washington, Democrats rowdily cheered the announcement of each state in which Polk commanded the electoral votes. News of "the Polk victory in New York was received last night at one o'clock with cannon firing and shouts that rent the air." New York was the key state in the election of 1844, and word of this victory roused the sleeping capital city; a crowd of enthusiastic Democrats danced and sang through the streets. "The people came en masse beneath our windows and cheered again & yet again with all their lungs: The President." Democrats planned a torchlight procession which surrounded the White House where people again cheered John Tyler. According to Julia, they could not "subdue their expressions of gratitude," but she soberly added that she hoped "they will not be as fleeting as they are violent."67 After the Polk victory, she boasted about numerous local expressions of gratitude to John Tyler for his service to the country. There were enough states' rights Democrats in Washington that Julia's perception of her husband's popularity may have been somewhat skewed.

66Seager, 241.
67Ibid.
Before leaving the White House, Julia helped Tyler celebrate the annexation of Texas. He had started moving toward this goal as early as 1841, and now interpreted the Polk victory as a mandate for bringing Texas into the union.\textsuperscript{68} Julia played a role in helping her husband achieve this end. Tyler's decision to ask Congress to annex Texas through joint resolution of each house prompted a new round of lively debates which brought Juliana, Margaret, and Alexander to Washington. The debates were bitter and commanded the attention of a broad range of political spectators.

Several months earlier, Secretary of State John C. Calhoun had set the tone for the Congressional debates when he wrote a letter lecturing the British on the blessings of slavery. He argued that the United States needed to annex Texas in order to foil British abolitionists. For many northerners, Calhoun's letter cut to the heart of the matter. The acquisition of Texas, they believed, was part of the slave power's political agenda. As a result, the debates over Texas in 1845 were a central component of the sectional arguments about slavery. Most Washington residents had heard the substance of these debates many times before.

During this politically tense period, Julia gave a series of parties which permitted the President to politick informally for Texas annexation. The first large reception took place during the afternoon on New Year's Day. Thousands of people attended, and only Whigs were conspicuous for their absence. Julia hosted other smaller receptions on January 21, February 4, and February 11. The best party, however, was the one held on February 18, 1845 and called her final

\textsuperscript{68}Freling, 368-369.
ball. According to most accounts, the party was one of the most splendid events ever hosted in Washington. Julia's purpose was to commemorate the end of her "auspicious reign," while providing a setting in which both she and the President could make last-minute arguments for the annexation of Texas. One New York newspaper reported that the ball "will be long remembered [because] it forms an era in Washington society."69

Through the series of receptions Julia kept a group of attractive young women close by who were all dressed in identical white dresses. The group included Alice Tyler, as well as some Gardiner relatives and friends from East Hampton. The women formed the First Lady's court and added a special regal dimension to the affair. More than anything, Julia wanted her party to resemble some of the royal parties that she had witnessed in Europe. Legislative guests enjoyed the affair, but it did not change political minds. Opponents of annexation had no intention of changing their votes because they had attended a White House party.70

Two weeks passed between the ball and Congressional action. In the end, Tyler was victorious and passage of the Texas resolutions became his most important political achievement. With only a few days left in his administration, neither he nor Julia would have to deal with the problem of war with Mexico. Instead they could retire to the relative tranquility of Sherwood Forest where Julia's primary focus would be domesticity.

70Seager, 262-265.
IV

Country Life and Slaves

During her eight months in the White House Julia had visited both Old Point Comfort and Charles City County as often as she could get away from Washington, but Virginia was still a new and strange place for her. She had no idea what life would be like in the secluded country setting of the James River plantation. Only one thing was certain—Eastern Virginia was extremely beautiful when Julia and John Tyler arrived there in mid-March of 1845. The early spring foliage was a welcome sight; most trees had already budded, and peach trees were in blossom. The fragrance of hyacinths rose from the flower beds in the yard, and a variety of tulips, cowslips, violets, and other flowers transformed the grounds of Sherwood Forest into an elegant picture.¹ Since this was Julia’s first spring in the South, she was happy to discover the mild weather of early March. Clear skies and moderate temperatures encouraged some of the women in the neighborhood to leave the warmth of their hearths in order to extend a cordial welcome to Julia. The first callers were Mrs. Robert Douthat and her two adult daughters—Miss Agnes Douthat and Mrs. John Selden of Westover Plantation. Mrs. Douthat lived about four miles from Sherwood Forest at Weyanoke Plantation.² Their gesture of hospitality especially pleased Julia because many of the residents of Charles

¹Julia Gardiner Tyler to Margaret Gardiner, 18 March 1845. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
²Ibid.
City County were hostile to John Tyler. Although Robert Douthat and John Selden admired John Tyler, most local men did not. Tyler's friend Edmund Ruffin reports that "nearly every neighbor, & most of his countrymen were whigs [sic] & followers of Clay, & who had learned to hate Tyler as a traitor, a renegade, & everything that was esteemed bad in their party creed."³

Local Whig sentiment in Charles City County was so strong that some Whig neighbors looked for ways to humiliate him. Soon after Tyler's return to Sherwood Forest, they arranged to have him appointed as overseer of the road where he lived. Edmund Ruffin reports that their object was to embarrass him by arranging for him to hold such a lowly position. The county clerk called at Sherwood Forest to personally announce the appointment, but Tyler refused to give him the opportunity to gloat. Instead, he surprised the clerk and his neighbors by accepting the post and serving efficiently. In this capacity, Tyler possessed the authority to summons neighbors, who lived on the same section of the road, for repair work whenever he decided it was necessary. They realized that their scheme had backfired when he frequently summoned them for road work during harvests and holidays. Unfortunately, two or three years passed before local Whig resentment finally dissipated.⁴ Fortunately, some of the local


⁴Ruffin, 128; Chitwood, 412-413;
women were able to put hospitality before politics, even if their husbands could not.

The Douthats made Julia feel welcome. They were charming and intelligent, and their visit put her at ease. Although the Douthats were country women, they were no less sophisticated or stylish than women Julia had known in New York and Washington. Julia stressed this point to Margaret when she wrote: "I will describe... Miss [Agnes] Douthat's dress to give you an idea of a young lady in this part of the world who resides most of her time in the country." Julia noted that "she is pretty, about twenty years of age [and] conversed like an accomplished person." Agnes wore "a rich striped silk with two flounces, velvet mantilla, and a white satin hat." Julia believed the fashions of these three country women were as tasteful as those of any elite women in America.5

Through female friends like the Douthat women, Julia could work to bridge the political divide that separated some of the local men from her husband. As long as the men treated each other coldly it was difficult for their wives to form normal friendships, and Julia badly needed a circle of female friends in Charles City County. Rural nineteenth century American women not only provided a social outlet for one another, but they also supported each other during times of illness, childbirth, or bereavement. Julia needed to become part of such a network. Additionally, she was now the wife of a southern planter, and the lives

---

of southern plantation women differed significantly from the lives of northern women.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese correctly observes that slavery shaped the lives of southern women and influenced their entire society including its rural nature. Life on a plantation tended to isolate white women from other women of their own race and class. Sometimes several days passed before white women saw one another, and that kind of a life offered a tremendous challenge to a vivacious northern socialite like Julia. During the two years preceding her marriage, summers in the sleepy village of East Hampton had seemed interminable. Now Julia had to find ways of preventing plantation life from becoming boring. Like other nineteenth century women, she occupied herself with needlework, and she read both newspapers and novels.

Although she did not see other women of her own class on a daily basis, her social life during the early spring of 1845 was busy enough to keep her happy. Besides the Douthats, other women also began to find their way to Sherwood Forest to call on Julia. Unfortunately, neither Julia nor John Tyler could easily leave Washington behind, and they imposed strict rules of protocol on their neighbors. According to Julia’s understanding, etiquette for a former First Lady required neighborhood women to make the first call. After the first call, she was free to reciprocate at her own leisure. People like Mr. and Mrs. William Harrison of Lower Brandon crossed the river to call at Sherwood Forest, and Julia noted

---

that "they are of the first aristocracy of Virginia." Mrs. Harrison’s manner was "very cultivated." Within a month after the Harrison’s visit, the Tylers accepted dinner invitations at both the Douthat home and the Harrison home.

These initial social encounters went smoothly until a breach of protocol made Julia’s relationship with some of the other women awkward. Ironically, Julia had an annoying dispute with her very first callers, the Douthat women. Among the guests at the dinner party in the Douthat home was a woman named Mrs. Coke, who had been a house guest there for several weeks. She was the only woman present who had not paid a first call at Sherwood Forest. Throughout the evening Mrs. Coke treated Julia coldly and conveyed the opinion that she had been slighted somehow. Before leaving Weyanoke that evening, Julia invited the Douthat women to visit her soon. John Tyler immediately whispered that she should advise Mrs. Coke to waive ceremony and come along with the other women. When Julia did this, Agnes Douthat informed her that Mrs. Coke had not called at Sherwood, because it was customary for new members of the community to make the first call. The remark aroused Julia’s immediate indignation. She took her own position as a former First Lady too seriously to expect anything less than deference from the other women. Julia noted:

I was completely taken by surprise for I thought it was generally understood to the wife of an Ex-president the first call should be made as is the custom towards the Ex-President himself. Of course it is very properly required by the wives of all Ex-presidents as they may in calling

---

7 Julia Gardiner Tyler to Margaret Gardiner, 10 April 1845. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

8 Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 13 May 1845. Tyler Family Papers.
upon a stranger staying with a neighbor chance unpleasantly upon the wife of a violent and abrasive political enemy of their husband. It is . . . but a common deference and a custom adopted by my predecessors. Who ever heard of Mrs. Madison, Mrs. Adams, or Mrs. Harrison making the first call and why should I any more than they?

Rather than create a scene at the Douthat's home, Julia responded that she had not known that Mrs. Coke's visit to the area would last so long and added that she would soon pay her a call. Once they had reached home, John Tyler instructed Julia to make the call as soon as possible and to use the occasion as an opportunity "to initiate her into the rules of Etiquette." 9

The return call to the Douthat home was not pleasant. Julia began by informing the Douthat women that she hoped to continue seeing them socially, but asked Mrs. Coke directly, "Do you not know that I am overlooking a general rule—that I waive a point of ceremony in making you this first call?" When the woman replied that she did not, Julia smiled and asserted, "I should always receive the first visit." The other women in the room were incredulous as she explained that "it was proper & right" for her to expect the first call. Their reaction was so swift and fiery that the men in an adjacent room stopped their conversation to see what the argument was about. Julia later boasted of her bold independence in this matter, but acknowledged that the men, who were present, had supported her side of the argument. Fortunately, "it ended very well . . . and we parted in the most cordial manner." Realizing that the matter would become the topic of local

gossip, she concluded that word of the dispute would prevent future breaches of protocol.10

The same afternoon Captain Coke, the woman's husband, and Dr. James Selden, husband of the Douthat's oldest daughter, travelled to Sherwood Forest to have tea with John Tyler. Julia claimed that she did not feel well enough to join them but asked her husband to "bring [the matter] up again, and let them know his ideas on the subject." After the men departed, Tyler reported that they had agreed that Julia's position was right and ought to be respected. More important, he assured Julia that she had made an impression on the people involved.11

Essentially, Julia had demanded deference from other slaveholding women. As southerners, they understood deference as an important facet of their society but were unaccustomed to giving this kind of treatment to other women of their own class. The Douthat women and their guest regarded themselves as Julia's equals and found her demand unsettling. In the end, they agreed to comply because their husbands required it. Although she thoroughly enjoyed her station as "Mrs. Ex-president Tyler" and fully expected deference from other women, Julia had pursued the matter partly because John Tyler had instructed her to do so. Ironically, resolution of this dispute resulted from traditional deference of slaveholding women to their husbands rather than deference to Julia. For her part, Julia was not much more independent than she had been two years earlier when her parents worried about her contact with Peggy Eaton's daughter. At

10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
least the Gardiners had permitted her to attend the wedding after learning that other people of their own class admitted the Eatons into their social circle. In that case, David and Juliana yielded to local opinion and etiquette, and so had Julia. Although Julia expected deference from her neighbors, John Tyler required it and was unwilling to yield to local opinion on a matter of protocol. He pushed Julia to lecture the other women on etiquette. Tyler's rigid position and the intervention of the other men did not make it any easier for the women to forge bonds of sisterhood.

While Julia did not complain about her situation at Sherwood Forest, her mother did. Juliana fretted about the great distance that separated her from Julia and added, "it seems to me as if you were out of place." But she cut to the heart of the matter when she asked:

Do inform me if you have any white people about you; [are] all your servants colored? Have you any white female upon whom you could rely in case of sickness for assistance & sympathy? Do write & tell me how you are situated with respect to these things. I should think a respectable, efficient white woman would be indispensable in your situation as housekeeper.12

Juliana worried about Julia's isolation from other women of her own race and class and demonstrated a keen understanding of the divide that separated black and white women within the plantation household. Juliana remembered her own experiences on Gardiner's Island more than twenty years earlier. She had lived there with her husband where they had employed black slaves to farm and

---

12Juliana Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 10 April 1845. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
maintain the family estate. She had been isolated from other white women and had not formed bonds of trust with women of color.¹³

Julia's adjustment to the role of plantation mistress was as difficult as her new relationship with southern white women. At first she regarded southern slaves as a novelty and expressed little awareness of the problems or complexity of the South's "peculiar institution." Like other Tidewater Virginia residents, she preferred to refer to slaves as servants. Like many other slaveholding families of the mid-nineteenth century, residents of Charles City County took slaves for granted, and Julia was no different than her neighbors. Black servants made life very easy for their owners, and she liked that.

After dining at the Harrison plantation, she noted how smoothly the dinner party went because "four waiters were in attendance." Julia reported to her mother that "people can afford as many waiters as one fancies in the South."¹⁴ She followed her neighbors' lead. When travelling to nearby homes along the James River, Julia and John Tyler used their own "beautiful boat with four [black] oarsmen" propelling them forward. Called the Pocahontas, it was bright blue with drab damask satin cushions trimmed in blue, and she dressed the oarsmen to match. They wore costumes of "bright blue and white check calico shirts, white linen pants, black patent leather belts, straw hats painted blue, and . . . one corner

¹³Elizabeth Fox-Genovese had noted the problem of isolation often experienced by white women on southern plantations. She gives the example of Mary Kendall who reported in 1853 that she had not seen the face of one white female in three weeks. *Within the Plantation Household*, 39.

¹⁴Julia G. Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 13 May 1845. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
of the shirt collar [was] worked with a braid[ed] bow and arrow to signify Sherwood Forest." Both Julia and John Tyler's initials were embroidered in the other end of the collar. When they called on other families along the river, a servant belonging to the host family would help them land and escort them to the house. Julia also designed elaborate outfits for her coachman and footmen, ordering black velvet ribbon and brass buckles for their hats from New York. Julia wanted to ornament her servants who were most likely to be seen by other whites.

Julia quickly learned, however, that management of household slaves was not as easy as she might have imagined. Like most newly wed plantation mistresses, she had no previous experience of managing either a household or domestic servants. Her standards were high, but she knew too little about the institution of slavery and the mechanics of doing household chores. Unfortunately, she failed to understand that her cooks lacked the ability to prepare complicated new recipes until her first dinner party ended in failure. While still angry and embarrassed, she reported the disaster to her mother:

I must tell you of the fate of my ice cream & frozen custard at the dinner. It was a failure which I did not hear of until they were bringing the dessert to the table. Too many cooks spoil the broth indeed! and I had five. They froze it and then let it all melt, and oh! my plum pudding—It was hard as a

15 Julia Gardiner Tyler to Margaret Gardiner, 10 June 1845; Julia Gardiner Tyler to Brother, [unspecified date] April 1845. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

brick bat. The one who had charge of that put it to boil at 12 o'clock and dinner came on the table at half-past four.\textsuperscript{17}

The main course, however, was superb. She noted that "the meat was excellent." The slave cooks depended on their own expertise when they prepared the "finest lamb you ever ate, roast & boiled shoulder of ham, tongue, a large round of prize beef, fried chicken" and an assortment of vegetables. Although the slave women may have sabotaged Julia's desert, it is more likely that she had neglected to advise them on the crucial aspect of timing. Frozen custard and ice cream prepared too soon before the guests began the main course would surely melt on a June day in eastern Virginia. The over-cooked plum pudding also suggests the cooks lack of familiarity with the recipes that Julia had selected.\textsuperscript{18}

Slave cooks did a much better job preparing the more ordinary cuisine which was part of the Tylers daily diet. Julia especially enjoyed the local fish that their people caught in the James River. Plantation cooks also impressed her with their preparation of both sturgeon and rock fish. (She explained to her sister that rock fish was the southern name for bass.) Chicken was also a frequent entrée in the Tyler home that slave cooks served with asparagus and other seasonal vegetables.\textsuperscript{19} Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has noted that slave cooks knew far more

\textsuperscript{17}Julia Gardiner Tyler to Margaret Gardiner, 5 June 1845. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19}Julia Gardiner Tyler to Margaret Gardiner, 10 April 1845; Julia Gardiner Tyler to brother, April 1845 [date unspecified]. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
about the intricacies of food preparation than slaveholding women. At Sherwood Forest slave women were proficient in the preparation of local dishes, but simply lacked the skills required to prepare elaborate recipes that Julia attempted to introduce into the menu.

For several months Julia exhibited a great deal of curiosity about the personal lives of the slaves, and John Tyler encouraged her to learn as much about his people as possible. Learning about both slave culture and her husband’s management style enabled Julia to become more proficient in her new duties as plantation mistress. Like most planters of his day, Tyler kept his slaves in line through his skillful paternalism. Unfortunately, Julia did not understand paternalism and only acknowledged John Tyler’s benevolence towards his slaves. But there was more to plantation paternalism than benevolence. As Eugene Genovese has observed, "Southern paternalism . . . had little to do with benevolence, kindness, and good cheer." Instead it was a system of discipline that encouraged both kindness and affection on one hand and cruelty and hatred on the other.21

During Julia’s first summer at Sherwood Forest, she took great interest in a party which John Tyler permitted the slaves to host. According to Julia, the party was a reciprocal event. Their slaves had attended so many other parties in the neighborhood, that they needed to respond in kind. She provided coffee, tea, and

---

20Fox-Genovese, 159-161.

sugar, but the slaves had to use their own money to pay for the other refreshments. Eugene Genovese has noted that slaves often earned money for personal use by selling vegetables.\textsuperscript{22} Sherwood Forest slaves were no different. Julia reported that:

they are privileged to raise chickens & eggs for sale and anything else they can raise [during] the hours their labor is not required by the plantation. Which by the way, as they are found in every comfort, makes their condition far easier and better than free blacks.\textsuperscript{23}

John Tyler had already taught Julia that their slaves were better off than free blacks, and she learned quickly.

Anxious to get a glimpse of the slave party, Julia sat up until very late because Tyler had told her "such occasions were well worth one sight." The slaves, however, were not as accommodating as he had hoped. They waited until about midnight to start their party—after Julia and John Tyler were already asleep. Since slave parties normally lasted until sunrise, Tyler awakened Julia early enough to observe some of the party which was held in the plantation laundry near the big house. As day began to break, they peered through the laundry window to observe the festivities. Julia found the event both amusing and enlightening. She reported:

You would have died almost laughing [sic], as did I. They were dancing a real African jig, and the music consisted of a striking of bones by one man and another was singing, clapping his sides for the time. "Hey Jim along, Jim along Josey" and "The udder day I cum to town." They seemed just as


\textsuperscript{23}Julia Gardiner Tyler to unspecified person. July 1845 [date unspecified]. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
fresh and were dancing and singing with as much determination as if they had just commenced. Their feet moved in dancing the jig with so much rapidity you could scarcely see them, and yet in this manner had they passed the night. In the middle of all the din one fellow had sunk fast asleep in a corner. We supposed from that they had been introducing in the "spread supper" a little whiskey.²⁴

As the years passed, John Tyler continued to tutor Julia in the intricacies of the South's peculiar institution and his own management style at Sherwood Forest. The lessons about slave culture were superficial, however, because they reflected only the views from the big house.

Like most young wives of her era, Julia wanted to put her own mark on everything in her household from the uniforms slaves wore to the cuisine that came to the family table. She expended her greatest energy, however, in decorating and furnishing the house. Shortly after her arrival at Sherwood Forest, she began putting the household bedrooms in order. Beginning her work at two o'clock one afternoon, Julia worked throughout the afternoon and evening. Before night came "the carpet was nailed down, the bedstead up and all the rest of the furniture in position." She claimed it would be impossible to "find so sweet a bedroom or chamber in every respect as mine. I assure you . . . my house outside and in is very elegant and quite becoming 'a President's Lady."²⁵

Having grown up surrounded by splendid furnishings, Julia worked hard to transform her own household into a place of exceptional beauty. Lack of experience in home decorating did not matter because Juliana and Margaret were

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 3 April 1845 in Seager, 293.
more than happy to help Julia in this regard. While still in the White House she had become involved in the restoration and the enlargement of Sherwood Forest and had solicited Juliana’s advice on matters like the choice between paint and wallpaper. Although Juliana and Margaret had begun shopping for Sherwood Forest during the fall of 1844, their task did not end after Julia moved into the plantation house. She continued to have them purchase pieces of furniture, and now they needed to obtain fabrics for drapes and carpets and have them shipped to Virginia.\textsuperscript{26} Julia consulted with her mother about every aspect of housekeeping and valued her opinions. During the years from 1845 to 1862, Juliana continued to give her daughter practical advice on a variety of domestic topics.

Julia was also grateful for her mother’s advice when she suffered from a serious bout of illness during her first month at Sherwood Forest. The warm temperatures of early spring tempted her to spend so much time outdoors that she over-exerted herself. The lovely woods surrounding Sherwood Forest provided a wonderful area for horseback riding, and Julia seldom passed a day without exercising her race horse. Other times she spent gardening. Although she had the help of field hands, she planted many of her own flower seeds. From New York Juliana warned that she risked taking a cold while sowing seeds in the damp earth. Always expecting the worse possible situation, Juliana feared that her

\textsuperscript{26}Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 7 November 1844. Tyler Papers. Library of Congress.
daughter would contract bilious fever. She constantly fretted about her own health and that of her children. Unfortunately, Julia shared her mother’s fears and spent much of her married life complaining about various ailments.

When Julia did become ill in late April, she depended on her mother’s counsel. Juliana sought the advice of a homeopathic physician in New York who carefully read all of Julia’s letters which described her symptoms. The most alarming one was discoloration of the skin. Described as "stains on the complexion," this symptom was more frightening for Julia than uncomfortable. She also suffered from "constriction of the bowels" and intermittent pain which was quite severe. Unfortunately, she failed to localize the pain. Whatever the problem, neither Dr. Quin nor Juliana had a definitive diagnosis, but they did agree that she did not have bilious fever. Juliana wondered if the stains were the result of a mercury based soap Julia had been using, or perhaps the ill effects of irregularity. Dr. Quin suspected the stains were the result of some "slight derangement of health connected with [Julia’s] periodical turns" and prescribed accordingly. Acting as intermediary between he and Julia, Juliana forwarded his prescription along with instructions which prohibited continued use of the mercury soap.

---

27 Juliana Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 10 April 1845. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University Library.

28 Juliana Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 19 May 1845. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University Library.
Julia’s illness persisted into late May. Throughout her ordeal she complained of facial pains, which may have stemmed from the dental fillings she had just received. Other symptoms were more severe.

I have been wandering around and lying part of the day on the bed and on the sofa impatiently bearing my stiff jaws and swelled glands . . . I cannot drink tea without difficulty and pain. I rubbed the side of my throat with ointment and applied it on a piece of flannel but my face pained me in the night and in the morning I came to the conclusion it had not benefitted me although it was the doctor’s prescription. 29

When Dr. Quin’s medication did not relieve the symptoms, Juliana began to worry about the lack of eastern Virginia physicians who were familiar with the practice of homeopathy. During the 1840s homeopathy was quite popular in New York but relatively unknown in other parts of the nation. Julia’s long distant treatment did not put her at risk because homeopathic practitioners prescribed medication in very minute doses. The merit of homeopathy was that practitioners did nothing to harm their patients. 30

Ordinarily, Julia and her mother resorted to a variety of remedies prescribed by orthodox physicians. Those cures ranged from doses of mercury to Castor oil and rhubarb pills. Rhubarb and castor oil were both mild purgatives. Far more severe illnesses which required a much stronger purgative, they used calomel. Calomel, a white tasteless powder, was actually mercurous chloride. Like many nineteenth century people, Juliana believed calomel was particularly


effective in ridding the body of impurities because the drug promoted both salivation and cleansing of the bowels. Unfortunately, neither Juliana nor Julia knew enough about calomel to realize that it also contained mercury. Since homeopathic physicians had abandoned the use of purgatives, Julia was much safer under the care of Dr. Quin, but his medications did little to relieve her symptoms.31

Ultimately she gave up on the homeopathic prescriptions and turned to both home remedies and the care of Dr. Henry Curtis, John Tyler's brother-in-law. Julia could not remember "the term [he] gave to my disease, but it was hi Doloreaux [sic] neuralgia and swelling of the tonsil glands altogether." Dr. Curtis prescribed a "dose of salts in sea water" and remained with her during the night of her highest fever. The next day he ordered her to take "a pill of two grains of Calomel which had some effect . . ." She continued to complain of excessive pain which Dr. Curtis relieved with morphine. Much to Julia's delight, the morphine allowed her to get badly needed sleep.32 Neither she nor her doctors understood the cause of her ailment or the reason for her relief. Apparently, she had suffered a serious case of tonsillitis, and her own immune system supplied the cure.

During Julia's illness, Juliana had become increasingly concerned about the need for a dependable white woman to assist her daughter at Sherwood Forest.

---

31Ibid., 4-5; and Juliana Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 12 January 1846. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University Library.

She had no confidence in slave women’s ability either to nurse Julia or to manage the household while she convalesced. Juliana feared that Julia would recover much too slowly if she had to worry about managing the household. Worse yet, she feared an immediate relapse if Julia resumed her normal activities too soon after her recovery. Juliana advised her that relapses "leave one delicate for a long time." So once again she insisted: "You ought to have an experienced respectable white woman with you who has some knowledge . . . [and] on whom you can rely. I think your situation at present an improper one."

Although Julia had recovered her health, Juliana was determined not to allow her daughter to experience another ailment without the companionship of a white woman. The persistence of her argument convinced both Julia and John Tyler to hire a housekeeper, but Juliana assumed the responsibility for finding a suitable one in New York. While Juliana searched for a housekeeper, Julia considered some local applicants herself, but she had not fully formulated her own expectations for a housekeeper. As late as October of 1845, she had not defined the relationship between a white housekeeper and household slaves. Evaluation of one applicant demonstrated her ambivalence. "A young girl applied for the situation. Do you think I had better at last take her upon trial?" References reported she "could easily be moulded and would be very attentive, dutiful, and industrious," but knew little about cooking and would have to depend on "Miss

---

33 Juliana Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 24 May 1845. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University Library.

34 Juliana Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 29 October 1945. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University Library.
Leslie’s book” for recipes. Additionally, she lacked sewing skills.\textsuperscript{35} Clearly this woman could offer Julia nothing but companionship. Juliana insisted that she needed more.

Finally, Juliana found an experienced housekeeper in New York who exhibited potential for supervising household slaves. Since Julia knew very little about managing a household, this was a step in the right direction. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has noted that most slaveholding women had little if any training that readied them for the chores of plantation mistresses.\textsuperscript{36} In her new arrangement Julia continued to bear the responsibility for the well-being of both her black and white family. She could not delegate all of the onerous chores of mistress to a hired housekeeper. Provision of clothing, food, and attention to the health care needs of all members of the plantation household remained Julia’s responsibility.

Catherine Wing arrived in November of 1845 to assume her duties as housekeeper at Sherwood Forest. She was a poor Irish immigrant who survived Juliana’s careful scrutiny. She accepted the position for room, board, and a five dollars per month salary.\textsuperscript{37} Shortly before Catherine’s arrival, Juliana reported that she had hired two new Irish servants for herself. She noted that her servants did not fit the "intemperate" stereotype but were both "sober & desirous to

\textsuperscript{35}Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 6 October 1845. Tyler Papers. Library of Congress.

\textsuperscript{36}Fox-Genovese, 110.

\textsuperscript{37}Seager, 301.
please. She urged Julia to "insist upon neatness and care and good order" and chided her to "learn to put your own things in order or I fear you will find no one to do it for you." 

Julia later described Catherine Wing as a devoted servant who loved the barnyard animals. When she walked around the plantation dogs, cats, geese, pigs, turkeys and chickens all paraded behind her. "She is the drollest sight walking along and all crying after & following her every time she makes her appearance." Unfortunately, Julia had more to say about Catherine’s rapport with animals than her relationship with the household slaves. Catherine did supervise household slaves, and the evidence suggests that Julia may have delegated too much responsibility to her. And, Catherine had less reason to concern herself about the slaves’ well-being than Julia did.

Within a month of Catherine’s arrival, both Margaret and Alexander visited Sherwood Forest and observed a small slave child who was too skimpily clad for the late autumn climate. Margaret reported the incident to her mother who quickly sent a written reprimand to Julia. As plantation mistress, Julia had the responsibility to make certain that all the slaves had adequate clothing. Her

---

38 22 November 1845, Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler. Yale University Library.

39 Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 18 November 1845. Quoted in Seager, 302.

40 Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 10 February 1846. College of William & Mary.
response to Juliana indicates that John Tyler also held her responsible for slave clothing:

I assure you, Mama, I had to laugh at your fears concerning the comfort of the negroes here. I remember the President’s telling me in a very amused manner how he saw Alexander gazing with astonishment at that very little negro Margaret particularly [mentioned] to you, and he begged me to have him clothed to a little greater degree. At the time, however, clothes were already making for him—and now he is like all the rest entirely fitted out with new warm clothes—coat, pantaloons, & shirt.41

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has noted that slaveholding women were not as enthusiastic about furnishing clothing for the slaves as they were for their own families, yet they had the duty of providing two sets of slave clothing per year.42 Clothing for individual slave children was not one of Julia’s priorities. Dressing black oarsmen to match the colors of her boat or providing costumes for those slaves who drove her carriage, was far more important.

Catherine’s presence at Sherwood Forest only increased the distance between Julia and those black women and men who worked within the plantation household. But Catherine’s situation could not have been ideal. As an Irish immigrant she must have experienced a certain amount of frustration at Sherwood Forest. During the 1840s, she had been a member of the most despised immigrant group in New York City. In Virginia she had to learn about the barriers of race and class, and that was not easy. Additionally, Julia received instructions on the management of servants, from Juliana who was a rigid and

41Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 16 December 1845. College of William & Mary.

42Fox-Genovese, 128.
demanding employer. Before Julia married, Juliana expressed a preference for German, Scottish, or Irish Protestant servants. When each new person entered her service, she explicitly prohibited them from visiting acquaintances in the village of East Hampton while employed at the Gardiner home. There was a very fine distinction between the management of black household slaves at Sherwood Forest and white maids employed in the Gardiner home. Juliana expected the servants to be at her service whenever she needed. Their tasks included making beds, ironing, washing, waiting, and any other chore that might be necessary.\textsuperscript{43} With Juliana as her advisor, Julia more than likely exacted as much work for Catherine’s salary as possible.

Julia also employed a white seamstress. Twenty-five year old Harriet Nelson of Norfolk entered employment at Sherwood Forest in February 1847. Although Julia characterized Harriet as a more intelligent woman than Catherine Wing, she only paid her three dollars per month.\textsuperscript{44} She explained that she could hire her for such low wages because southern, white working class women had to accept what they could get. Slave labor limited the number of available jobs, and local women were unlikely to leave their home state in search of employment.\textsuperscript{45} Harriet had to work hard for her salary. As seamstress, she was responsible for

\textsuperscript{43}Julia Gardiner to Alexander Gardiner with a postscript from Juliana Gardiner, 21 July 1842. Yale University Library.

\textsuperscript{44}Seager, 302.

\textsuperscript{45}Seager, 302.
the clothing of the white family and between sixty and seventy slaves. She performed a vital service and significantly eased Julia’s burden.

Catherine Wing and Harriet Nelson worked side by side with slave women including Louisa, Fanny, and Sarry without incident in an unusual mixture of slave and free labor. Julia established a labor system within the main house that involved lower level white managers who were like overseers. As housekeeper, Catherine depended on the cooperation of slave women for her own success. Women like Louisa, Sarry, and Fanny cut patterns and stitched clothing under the direction of Harriet Nelson in the same way they would have responded to Julia’s directions. The only aspect of the arrangement that was unusual was Julia’s decision to remove herself from the more time-consuming chores which defined the lives of most slaveholding women.

Julia was mute about topics like slave discipline or her white employees’ views of the plantation slaves, but her silence does not mean that there were no problems. Slaves at Sherwood Forest engaged in the same struggles with whites as they did in other parts of the South. One problem that particularly disturbed Julia was theft. In December 1846, the Tylers discovered that slaves had been stealing candles, sugar, Mocha coffee, and other goods from the storeroom that Catherine kept locked. Slaves discovered that the laundry key also fit the storeroom and took whatever they wanted over the course of a six month period. Catherine had noticed how quickly supplies were running out but did not initially suspect the slaves of stealing. One night a slave spilled brown sugar while in the

46Seager, 302.
storeroom and failed to clean it up. Brown sugar on the floor of the orderly storeroom was all the evidence that John Tyler needed to convince him that the culprits were slaves. Julia noted that "Catherine has just had her eyes opened to the iniquity of the servants." Catherine cried all day because the slaves had outwitted her while the keys were in her charge. "She has had now some experience and will mark her barrels in the hereafter."47

Julia was not as trusting as Catherine and explained that "outrageous evidence" implicated the servants.48 Eugene Genovese has noted that slaveholding whites expected their slaves' to steal and many southerners took stealing for granted while others expressed their outrage. For all of her interest in slave culture, Julia had not learned that slaves did not view taking food and other necessary items from their owners as stealing. As Genovese correctly observes, slaves "stole from each other but merely took from their masters. If they were in fact his chattels, how could they steal from him?"49

No one knows whether Louisa, Sarry, or Fanny ever resisted the commands of Catherine and Harriet, but the works of Eugene Genovese and others suggest that they probably did. Occasionally, Catherine and Harriet may have found it necessary to use some form of punishment to reinforce their authority. If so, Julia did not think it merited comment. Slave punishment was a fact of life in the

48Ibid.
49Genovese, 600-602.
antebellum South. Within a two years Julia had embraced plantation slavery and all of its aspects, both bad and good. Yet white female employees enabled Julia to live more like a northern matron than a plantation mistress. Giving directions to Catherine and Harriet was easier than supervising six or more household slaves.

During Catherine Wing’s three years of service at Sherwood Forest, Julia depended on her for the smooth operation of the household and the success of her dinner parties. In April 1846, Catherine supervised slave cooks in the preparation of an elaborate party which featured an extensive menu:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soup</th>
<th>Lettuce &amp; radishes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broiler rock fish</td>
<td>Parsnips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baked shad &amp; roe</td>
<td>Pickles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preserved salmon</td>
<td>Desert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preserved lobster</td>
<td>Luck pudding &amp; wine sauce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a round of beef</td>
<td>mince pie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a boiled ham</td>
<td>sponge cake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boiled turkey and egg sauce</td>
<td>two forms of ice cream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boiled tongue</td>
<td>two moulds of jelly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken salad</td>
<td>two moulds of blanc mange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish potatoes</td>
<td>a centre stand of soft custard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrots</td>
<td>four dishes of preserves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>Wines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Peas</td>
<td>sparkling hock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spinach</td>
<td>two kinds of madeira</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celery</td>
<td>sherry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>port.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This menu was representative of Sherwood Forest parties, and Catherine had enough talent to supervise every aspect of food preparation in order to prevent embarrassments for Julia. Julia’s dinner parties were elaborate events.

---

50A menu written by Julia Gardiner Tyler, April 1846. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
Catherine’s life, however, did not revolve around Julia. She wanted a family and a household of her own. Sometime during 1848, she became engaged to a man who did not measure up to the standards of either Julia or Juliana. Julia braced herself for Catherine’s departure, but the intended groom called the wedding off. Within a few months, the wedding was on again, and Julia realized that this time Catherine would actually leave. Juliana was more blunt; she believed Catherine was making a poor decision and chided Julia to tell her so:

Do you know I think she is going to take a weak step indeed in trusting him again. I would not place the least confidence in her proprietorations [sic] so heartless as he had already proven himself. Tell her by all means to place every cent she possesses beyond his reach. I should not be surprised if he had been led from one foolish slip to another so as now to be destitute of money or friends and is coming to her for what little she has been able to earn. It is your duty to advise her to take care of her money for herself for time of necessity so that if she is foolish enough to return to him he will not deprive her of that little [in]dependence.51

Juliana’s practical and sound advice might have applied to any financially independent woman who married during the nineteenth century. But in this case, she was interfering in both Catherine’s and Julia’s affairs. A salary of $5 per month had not provided financial independence for Catherine, as Julia well knew. Whether she ever advised Catherine in this matter or not is unknown. If she did, her comments were disingenuous. The barrier of class prevented Julia and Catherine from forming bonds of sisterhood. When Catherine left Sherwood Forest, all contact with Julia ended.

During the years prior to the Civil War, Julia had other white domestic employees at Sherwood Forest. Their service was vital to the operation of the household and depended on the full cooperation of household slaves. Both white and black servants enabled Julia to view herself as the reigning belle of Charles City County. Although some of the other slaveholding women in the neighborhood resented having to show deference to her, everyone enjoyed her parties. Julia was honest enough to credit Catherine Wing for her successful social events, but she failed to acknowledge Catherine’s dependence on slave cooks and butlers.

Julia’s dependence on slaves increased between 1846 and the beginning of the Civil War. As the size of her family grew there were greater labor demands within the plantation household. But like other southern women, she did not focus on slaves. Once Julia had satisfied her own curiosity about their culture, she accepted black slaves as a normal part of southern plantation life. She was much more interested in her husband and family than slaves, female neighbors, or Sherwood Forest. Julia missed the family she had left behind in New York, but she forged even stronger ties with them as she began to have children of her own.
V

Raising Quite A Large Family

Julia had more time to spend with John Tyler after she delegated supervision of household slaves to white domestic servants. Always a passionate woman, Julia loved her husband and tried to arrange her day around him. She enjoyed quiet evenings when they could sit on the piazza or stroll together in the garden. In the evenings, she rode her pony out to the fields to join her husband as he supervised the slaves. ¹ The time they spent alone at Sherwood Forest was important for both John and Julia. She regarded him as an ideal mate ever attentive to her needs. Throughout their marriage, Julia's love for John Tyler continued to grow. During their wedding trip she wrote: "In the world, as here, wherever he goes and whatever is done, it is me in all situations he only seems to consider."² When he died eighteen years later, she reflected: "A truer man, a tenderer husband . . . never existed. To have been loved by such a man was love worth having."³

Edmund Ruffin commented on the relationship between John and Julia Tyler after making two visits to Sherwood Forest. In 1854, he told Julia that although he had never approved of "old men marrying young wives," he was now

¹Julia Gardiner Tyler to Alexander Gardiner, 17 June 1845. College of William & Mary.
²Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 11 July 1844. College of William & Mary.
distinctly in favor of it, for until he stayed with the Tylers he had no idea of
domestic felicity. Four years later Ruffin was still arguing that May-December
marriages do not work, but another visit to Sherwood Forest reassured him that
the Tylers' situation was exceptional. He gave Julia much of the credit for the
success for she was different from other young women who married old men.
Instead of being a fortune hunter, "she was a young, beautiful, & much admired
belle . . . of a high position family & fortune—accomplished, travelled, & of
excellent mind" when she married Tyler. Ruffin believed Julia's motive for
marrying the President of the United States was nothing more than "blind
ambition." But he believed ambition was nobler than avarice or the desire to gain
wealth. What impressed Ruffin most was Julia's unselfish devotion to her husband
after he left the presidency:

And when, leaving public life, Mr. Tyler retired to this seclusion, & they
were (for sometime) deprived of almost all social pleasures. Mrs. Tyler has
never seemed to miss or regret the world of fashion & pleasure in which
she formerly lived exclusively, & had every means to enjoy. If ever a young
wife truly loved an old husband (which I have deemed impossible) she
does. And it is not exhibited in any displays of fondness which would be to
me evidences of acting & deceit. Her manner in this respect is
unexceptionable. But she listens, in silence, to every remark he makes &
seems to admire in silence every expression, as if the words of wisdom.

As positive as Ruffin's remarks were, he only provided an assessment of Julia's
role in the marriage. He offered no opinions about John Tyler's love and

---

4Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 22 April 1854. Tyler Family
Papers. College of William & Mary.

5Edmund Ruffin, The Diary of Edmund Ruffin, Volume I, edited by William Kauffman
Scarborough with a Foreword by Avery Craven (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press,
1972), 122.
devotion for Julia or his motives for marrying her. Instead, Julia conformed to Ruffin’s image of the ideal wife—a gentle, retiring woman who had made great personal sacrifices for the love of her husband.

Sometimes the efforts she made in behalf of her husband clearly reflected self-interest. Nothing demonstrated this any more than Julia’s constant concern for his public reputation. Since her own social standing depended on his, she continued to pore over newspapers looking for articles both complimentary and critical of the Tyler administration. Other members of the Gardiner family also participated in this endeavor and forwarded news articles and various journals to Julia. Often John Tyler wrote letters to newspaper editors in his own defense. But Julia was the member of the household most easily angered by unfavorable accounts of the Tyler administration and would have preferred to see each negative article countered with a letter-to-the-editor. She usually sought the reaction of her brother Alexander, and he was quick to respond. Sometimes he expressed outrage, but on other occasions Alexander reminded his sister that not every negative article had an impact on the general population. "The papers in which they are published have no circulation among respectable classes, and I will venture to say the articles themselves attract no notice or consideration from any class."6

There was nothing she could do to control editorial comments about John Tyler, but Julia hoped her brother shared enough of her indignation to lift his pen

to write articles and letters defending her husband. Although Alexander liked and admired Tyler, he usually left the writing to him. Two years after leaving the White House, Julia realized that the anti-Tyler venom was as strong as it had been in 1845. The Tyler Presidency had been so controversial that it would evoke criticisms for generations. John Tyler fueled her concerns. He had a nagging ambition to run for the presidency in 1848, and Julia would have liked nothing better than to become First Lady again. Unfortunately, she did not understand that there was nothing that anyone could do to change people's assessment of her husband's presidency. Julia spent the rest of her life reacting to negative reports about John Tyler's term of office, and she inspired her children to do the same thing.

In early 1846, no one was more alarmed than Julia when rumors circulated that she had left John Tyler and returned to her family in New York. The first reports of the alleged separation appeared in New York newspapers and caught the attention of an indignant Juliana. Before long Washington area newspapers also reported the story. Apparently, word of domestic problems between John Tyler, Jr. and his wife had fueled the speculation. As Julia fumed in February 1846, she was in her fourth month of pregnancy, and her marriage could not have been stronger. Julia was nauseated and irritable much of the time, but, although usually prone to complain about her health, she was uncharacteristically quiet about the physical discomforts of pregnancy.

7Seager, 314.
8Juliana Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 2 February 1846. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University Library.
Rather than complaining, she instructed her mother and sister to sew gifts for the baby. "Margaret... I wish you to set about making a beautiful spread for the crib as your present." Julia also instructed Margaret to "ask Mama if she really thinks I am in any haste in my preparations as I trace back to the middle of last month [there are] some very lovely manifestations... [that] make me very nervous at times." Although Julia was comfortable, Juliana was anxious to take charge. Julia agreed to give birth in New York under her mother's protective supervision. The decision made sense. The baby was due during the summer months, the time of the year when Charles City County residents feared malaria and yellow fever. As Sally McMillen has observed, long full skirts, "layers of petticoats, tight lacing and endemic diseases" encouraged pregnant women in the nineteenth-century South to travel long distances to enjoy cooler climates. Julia decided to leave Charles City County, and Tyler agreed that it was best for the baby to be born in New York.

In early April 1846 Juliana announced that she would arrive at Sherwood Forest at the end of the month to take Julia back to New York. She hoped to begin the return trip home by the first of May. The announcement stunned Julia because she had not intended to leave her husband so soon. She informed her mother that "the President was... quite shocked at the idea of such an extended separation as my going so early would cause. It would make him very unhappy,

---


but he says he shall submit to anything you prefer & advise." Julia begged her mother to delay the trip until June because Tyler would be unable to join her until late July.\textsuperscript{11} Robert Seager reports that Tyler escorted Julia to New York in July as her time for confinement neared.\textsuperscript{12} By delaying her trip, Julia neither escaped the intense heat nor the summer diseases.

On July 12, 1846, Julia gave birth to David Gardiner Tyler (called "Gardie") at her mother's home. Although childbirth played a central role in her married life, she did not record this experience or the six other deliveries which followed. Labor and delivery were frightening indeed life-threatening for nineteenth century women. Juliana doubtless attempted to provide her daughter with the best medical care possible, but Julia did not write about her confinement. Some women may have failed to write about their experience because they were so anxious to forget the pain and suffering and move ahead to the joys of parenthood.

Once back in Virginia, she received a constant stream of letters from East Hampton, advising her on care of herself and the baby. A back plaster arrived in the mail after Juliana learned that she had suffered a "weakness" in the back. "It is a complaint with many females and a plaster is I believe the usual remedy. Lift the baby as easily as possible & avoid everything that may strain your back."\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11}Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 7 April 1846. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

\textsuperscript{12}Seager, 335.

\textsuperscript{13}Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 10 December 1846. Yale University Library.
Plasters were unpleasant paste-like concoctions which women applied to their skin as counterirritants. Totally accepting of her mother's amateur medical expertise, Julia never complained about either the advice or the prescriptions. Instead she continued to communicate medical discomforts through the mail, and her mother prescribed in kind.

During Julia's pregnancy, John Tyler began to experience financial difficulties. Loss of the plantation's wheat crop in 1846 was the major source of his worries. Renovations on Sherwood Forest, new furnishings, trips to the Virginia Springs, and Julia's wardrobe all added to Tyler's monetary problems. During the fall of 1846, Tyler turned to Alexander Gardiner for assistance. Julia must have encouraged him to request the loan of "$1500 at four months, pledging myself to redeem the draft myself when it falls due." Tyler hoped to repay Julia's family as soon as he received the proceeds from his corn crop.

Julia did not spend much time worrying about money. She was confident of her own family's ability to lend them money whenever they needed anything. Instead she directed her energies to child care. A proud mother, she kept her family apprised of the baby's progress. But not even her brother Alexander was fully confident of Julia's ability to take care of a baby. When news reached New York in the spring of 1847 that Julia had taken Gardie on a shopping trip to Richmond, the reprimand came from him. Julia had just had Gardie vaccinated,

---

14Seager, 310.
and the Gardiners feared that she had unduly exposed him to a cold by taking him
to the city.16 Juliana, who had no confidence in slave nurses, admonished Julia
"not [to] allow the nurse to put anything she may be eating in [the baby’s] mouth.
You must set your face against it at once. What food he takes let it be pure &
properly prepared for the baby."17

Julia was quite capable of taking care of her baby without advice from New
York. Aside from her own maternal instincts, she had the assistance of her
husband. A veteran when it came to rearing children, John Tyler had already
helped care for seven older children born to his first wife. Julia provided a
glimpse of his role as father in a letter to her mother:

You would be amused to see what an excellent nurse the President has
become. I devolve the whole chore in the morning upon him. The babe
wakes at early dawn, and he rises and sits with it before the fire until the
horn rouses the plantation and its own proper nurse enters to relieve him.
All this time I very calmly and cruelly go to sleep. This is really very right,
for to be broken of sleep agrees better with the President than with me.18

Both John and Julia Tyler were devoted parents.

Gardie was a lively baby who kept Julia entertained. She enjoyed
parenthood and excitedly reported every development in his life to her mother
and sister. Juliana advised Julia to breast feed Gardie as long as possible in order
to avoid conceiving another child too quickly. Juliana thought one child was

16Alexander Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 18 March 1847. Tyler Papers. Library of
Congress.

17Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, n. d. 1847. Gardiner Family
Papers. Yale University Library.

18Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 10 December 1846. Tyler Family
Papers. College of William & Mary.
enough for her daughter and considered telling John Tyler as much.\textsuperscript{19} There was merit to her argument. She was fully aware of her son-in-law’s financial situation and had just reason to worry about the size of Julia’s family.

Juliana had a lot to learn about her daughter’s marriage. In the South family size was ordinarily the father’s prerogative, and men took great pride in their growing families. But the evidence suggests that Julia also wanted a large family. Before Gardie’s birth, John Tyler had already fathered seven children, and the prospects of additional children may have been less important to him than to Julia. He did take great joy in this child, however, and had no plans to limit Julia’s chances of becoming pregnant again.

As Julia became increasingly absorbed with the care of her child, Julia learned that motherhood was not always easy. When barely more than three months old, Gardie displayed symptoms of whooping cough and frightened her, but he managed to escape without actually contracting the disease.\textsuperscript{20} By the time Gardie was five months old, Julia was already boasting that "his intelligence increases with every day" and "he sleeps undisturbed all night until daybreak." Annoying problems like teething pain also commanded her attention. But Gardie was a special child who deserved the best his parents could provide for him. To that end, Julia announced that they would formally present him with a slave child as his Christmas present. The child, Victoria Short, was Louisa’s baby and was

\textsuperscript{19}Seager, 338.

\textsuperscript{20}John Tyler to Alexander Gardiner, 1 November 1847. Tyler Papers. Library of Congress.
only two days younger than Gardie. Julia did not attempt to discover how Louisa felt about the matter. After all John Tyler owned both Louisa and Victoria Short, and he had the authority to transfer ownership to whomever he wanted. The gift of a slave child was a measure of John Tyler's authority over the maternity of both black and white women at Sherwood Forest.

Within a year Julia was pregnant with her second child. Although not unhappy, she was not eager to experience the discomfort of parturition again. In February 1848 she asked her sister Margaret to have their mother make inquiries about the use of chloroform as an anesthetic for labor:

The papers state Queen Victoria has sent for a distinguished physician who employs it, for the purpose of consulting with him in reference to herself. She expects birth in April. Now insist upon Mama's doing this if from no other motive but curiosity. It is in use in Norfolk by the surgeons. I thought seriously of causing the President to write to Dr. Hitchcock of Boston, who operates so successfully with it, according to the Boston paper. I hope Mama will acquaint herself all about it.

British physician Sir James Simpson first used chloroform in obstetrics in 1847, but it was not used for any medical procedure in Virginia until sometime in 1848. Dr. James Bolton of Richmond, who may have been the first Virginian to use chloroform in his practice, published A Test For the Safety Point in Anaesthesia in

---


22 Julia Gardiner Tyler to Margaret Gardiner Beeckman, 29 February 1848. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
1852. There was no possibility of a safe chloroform-assisted delivery at Sherwood Forest in the spring of 1848.23

Julia delivered her baby with the assistance of a nurse. Given the size of the baby, chloroform might have made the ordeal easier. John Alexander (Aleck) Tyler weighed twelve pounds at birth. Tyler reported the delivery to his brother-in-law Henry Curtis, the Richmond physician who had procured the nurse:

I presume . . . it will give you pleasure to be informed that [Julia] gave birth on the day before yesterday to a fine boy and that both are doing well. This young Virginian is only rivalled by his brother who hails from New York that being his birth state. I trust in due season Mrs. Tyler will have passed through her probationary confinement when we will both be happy to see you under our roof and with parental pride will make our exhibition of [both] New Yorker and Virginian.24

He offered no details about Julia’s discomfort during parturition, but she was probably not ready to joke about one child coming from Virginia and the other from New York.

After Aleck, babies came in quick succession. On Christmas Day in 1849, Julia gave birth to her first daughter, who also bore the name Julia Gardiner Tyler. The family called her Julie. McLachlan (called Lachlan) was born December 9, 1851. Unfortunately, the circumstances surrounding his birth were difficult. John Tyler had felt poorly throughout the fall and winter and confined himself to the house. In no condition to be of much use to anyone, he meandered about, complaining of his lack of energy. As the time for Julia’s confinement

23Wyndham B. Blanton, Medicine in Virginia in the Nineteenth Century (Richmond: Garrett & Massie, Inc, 1933), 146.

24John Tyler to Dr. Patterson, 9 April 1848. Tyler Papers. Library of Congress.
neared, Juliana arrived to assist her daughter and grandchildren but quickly became the victim of a "violent and alarming attack of illness." Tyler hoped to soon "be relieved from these depressing circumstances." Nevertheless, he reported to Dr. Henry Curtis:

Mrs. Tyler is doing well and I trust will soon be herself again. You perceive that we are raising quite a large family, three boys and one girl and all fine children in intellect and mechanism. The little girl, who you have never seen is as bright as her mother, and is already the idol of the household. The boys by a sort of instinct look upon her as one claiming their special regard.25

During the nineteenth century endemic and epidemic diseases resulted in grave risks for infants and children. The South was particularly dangerous because of its harsh disease environment. Diseases of both European and African origin thrived in the southern climate. Additionally, poor sanitation and inadequate nutrition lowered the resistance of many southerners. Infant and childhood mortality rates were particularly high.26 Each new baby represented a potential victim of a deadly disease and, consequently, great anguish for its parents. Such was the case of Lachlan who exhibited the symptoms of cholera infantum, sometimes called summer diarrhea. During the two or three days that the symptoms persisted, the baby’s illness was particularly frightening to Julia and John Tyler, who used traditional drugs to treat their son.27


was a frequent cause of death, and they were lucky that Lachlan was too healthy to succumb to the ill effects of this disease.

Julia gave birth to three addition children after Lachlan. On August 24, 1853, at age thirty-three she bore Lyon Gardiner (Lonnie) Tyler. John Tyler was sixty-three at the time. Robert Fitzwalter Tyler was born March 12, 1856. Their second daughter and last child, Pearl was born June 13, 1860. During a span of fourteen years, Julia bore seven children and became increasingly involved in the role of child rearing. Tyler enjoyed the children and continued actively to assist Julia with their care. Nothing was more enjoyable for him than playing the violin to entertain them.28

Childcare and fatigue often prevented Julia from writing letters to her family. She liked to write to her mother and sister on a regular basis, and John Tyler often helped by writing letters on her behalf. Correspondence from Sherwood Forest often began with the following explanation: "I am Julia's amanuensis." The next line would provide Julia's excuse for not writing herself. At other times, Tyler simply began with the excuse. "Julia being very much fatigued and over done by nursing our little boy . . . requests me dear Margaret to substitute [for] her in a short note to you." Julia enjoyed this arrangement and continued to require him to write letters on her behalf. In 1853 he began a letter

to Juliana, "Julia still employs me as her amanuensis, being constantly engaged with her still nameless boy." 29

When pregnancies did not prevent Julia from travelling by stage coach, she and Tyler made annual pilgrimages to mineral spas for both medicinal and social reasons. The Virginia Springs offered a variety of mineral waters and medical journals reported their virtues. Most Virginia gentleman believed they had a duty to take their families to the spas each summer 30 A trip to the Virginia spas included stops at White Sulphur Springs, Hot Springs, Warm Springs, Red Springs, and Rockbridge Alum Springs. If visitors did not like the taste of the waters, they could reap benefits by bathing in them. Julia did both. Sometimes they went to Saratoga Springs, New York instead, and those trips usually included Juliana and Margaret. Saratoga Springs claimed to offer the same medicinal benefits as the spas in Virginia.

Although southerners believed mineral waters were good preventive medicine, no one expected them to slow the maturation process. Childbearing had changed Julia's appearance significantly, but she retained much of her beauty. In the spring of 1847, she told Margaret, "I am fleshier than I used to be. Certainly my arms are very much larger. Dr. D_ says my stomach must be weak. I think that very . . . probable. I am ready to try any diet or any prescription." 31


30 Blanton, 342.

Characteristically blunt, Juliana wrote, "Do not grow lazy as you increase in fat or rather do not allow your increase of size to make you look lazy. Keep your figure erect [and] shoulders braced back."\(^3\)\(^2\) Julia had not lost weight by the 1850s but no longer worried about regaining her more petite size. Beauty and glamour were much too important simply to give up on her appearance, but she had little control over the effects of pregnancy on her body. Years of childbearing had taken a toll on both her figure and her posture, but some observers continued to regard her as a lovely woman. There were also other physical changes she could not control. Years of calomel use had damaged her teeth, and that was a source of some embarrassment.\(^3\)\(^3\) James C. Johnston, a guest who saw her at Warm Springs, Virginia, in 1854, said she had "a mouthful of artificial teeth."\(^3\)\(^4\) In 1857 Edmund Ruffin said Julia "appeared as young & blooming as when I saw her . . . two [actually three] years ago & enough so for 20 years only, though now the mother of six."\(^3\)\(^5\) Ruffin's remarks were kind. Julia did not look like a twenty year old, but there was nothing she could do to prevent aging. Complaining about her appearance would not solve anything, and Julia knew that. Instead she kept her focus on John Tyler, the children, and her step-children.

\(^3\)\(^2\)Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 8 June 1847. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University Library.
\(^3\)\(^3\)Sally McMillen notes that calomel use caused people's teeth to fall out.
\(^3\)\(^5\)Ruffin, 122.
From the very first moment of their marriage, Julia had been both stepmother and friend to Tyler's two teenage children. At first there were tensions between Alice Tyler and Julia, but the relationship steadily improved. They became more like sisters than mother and daughter, and Alice often served as Julia's traveling companion. The younger Tazwell was only fourteen when his father married, and he liked Julia from the very start. Julia understood that she could not replace the children's own mother, and she did not require them to call her mother. Tazwell referred to Julia as *Sister Julia* and invited her to call him "brother, son, friend, cousin, or anything you chose." Not only had Julia become the mother of teenagers at twenty-four years old, but she had assumed as much responsibility for their care as possible.

Alice Tyler remained very much a part of the household at Sherwood Forest until her marriage in July 1850. As long as Alice remained in her father's house, her well-being was a legitimate concern of Julia's. Although only six years older than Alice, Julia often had responsibility for overseeing her social schedule. When Elizabeth Tyler Waller, one of John Tyler's older daughters, wanted Alice to help her preside over a table at a fair in Williamsburg in 1846, she requested permission from both Julia and John Tyler. Later that year Julia had a role in helping decide whether Alice would accept any of the three invitations she had

---

36Tazwell Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 2 September 1845. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

received to spend the winter away from home. Alice's flirtations concerned both John and Julia, and both were relieved when she announced her plans to marry Henry Mandeville Denison, the rector of Bruton Parish Church. Even so, preparations for a wedding at Sherwood Forest were enough to tax the endurance of even a seasoned hostess like Julia.

Juliana and Margaret Gardiner were also very much a part of Julia's household. Although they continued to reside in New York, the two women regularly travelled to Virginia for extended visits. Alexander and David were also frequent guests. Julia was always anxious for members of her family to visit and frequently requested their presence. In February 1846 Alexander wrote, "I learn through a letter received from Margaret . . . that you are expecting me at Sherwood. If I should consult my feelings, nothing could give me more pleasure than to visit you again." In the spring of 1848, Julia notified him that "the forest trees are in full foliage, and our place really presents a fine appearance . . . if you should take a trip to Kentucky you must certainly first come to see us."

Sometimes the babies were a way of coaxing family members to visit. In


41 Julia Gardiner Tyler to Alexander Gardiner, 1 May 1848. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
November 1847 Julia described Gardie’s growth to her mother and added, "I am constantly wishing you could see him."42

The number of white adults at Sherwood Forest seemed to change regularly. Visiting family members and white employees often outnumbered the nuclear family. Margaret Gardiner married in 1848 and made a wedding trip to Sherwood Forest. While she was there, the center of attention was her new husband, John Beeckman. His brother Gilbert came along too.43 In addition to a white housekeeper and a white seamstress, Julia decided she needed a white nurse. This time she chose a French woman named Hortense who could teach the children to pray and sing in French.44 Southern households often departed from the nuclear model, and Sherwood Forest was no exception. Visiting kin disrupted ordinary family routines, and white live-in servants also influenced life within Julia’s household. When female relatives were present they assisted Julia with household chores and child care, while male kin like David accompanied John Tyler into the woods to hunt. When there were no visitors, Julia interacted daily with white women like Harriet Nelson and Hortense.

The company of white servants was hardly a substitute for her mother and sister, and Julia realized this most of all during times of family crisis. During the 1850s, the family suffered several deaths which caused them to look to one


43Seager, 348.

44Julia Gardiner Tyler to Margaret Gardiner Beeckman, 30 March 1857. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
another for consolation. The first of occurred in early 1850 when Margaret’s husband died of an accidental gunshot wound while in California attempting to strike it rich. The distance from Sherwood Forest to New York prevented Julia from rushing to console her sister. During this time of bereavement, she quickly discovered that letters were hardly a substitute for companionship as she tried to comfort Margaret through the mail.\textsuperscript{45}

Later that same year, John Tyler’s daughter Elizabeth Tyler Waller died. Julia convinced herself that "Lizzie [had] departed this life for another and a better, I have no doubt." Adding that "she left behind an infant boy 17 days old" and three other children, Julia worried about Lizzie’s survivors, particularly John Tyler. The family had called Tyler to her sickbed, but he did not arrive until his daughter was already dead. Lizzie was only twenty-seven years old. Four years after Lizzie’s death, Alice Tyler Denison died suddenly of "bilious colic," leaving two children behind.\textsuperscript{46} Her death devastated both John and Julia Tyler. They provided as much support and consolation for each other as possible during their time of bereavement.\textsuperscript{47}

In early 1851, Alexander Gardiner died suddenly. His death was particularly painful for Julia. Both she and Juliana consulted physicians in an attempt to discover the cause of death. Ultimately the diagnosis was an extreme case of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[45] Julia Gardiner Tyler to David Gardiner, 24 July 1850. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University Library.
\item[46] Seager, 350.
\item[47] Julia Gardiner Tyler to David Gardiner, 24 July 1850. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University Library.
\end{footnotes}
bilious colic which resulted in inflammation of the bowels.\textsuperscript{48} Uncertain whether she had ever "felt so severe a blow," Julia again found the distance from East Hampton unbearable. Juliana was visiting Sherwood Forest when the news reached her, and the care of small children prevented Julia from accompanying her mother home to assist with funeral arrangements. Instead she counseled Juliana that the time had come for the family "to turn our feelings towards the living and recover, as it is our duty to do, our cheerfulness." Perhaps a family gathering at Sherwood Forest would console everyone:

\begin{quote}
Will you not now return here? We should feel so much better together; our companionship and the little children will help to raise the weight from our spirits. If you will say so, the P[resident] will come on for you. Is it not the best thing for you & M[argaret] to do—return to us?\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

Julia was very close to Alexander and needed the consolation of her family as much as they needed her. Uncharacteristically, she also turned to religion during her time of grief. Julia was not a religious person, but she found solace in the meditations of a devotional book called \textit{Morning Exercises for the Closet}. For the first time in her life, she turned to God during a time of personal crisis.\textsuperscript{50}

Julia was also keenly aware that Alexander's death was particularly hard for her husband. John Tyler had great respect for his brother-in-law and called him the "chosen friend of his bosom."\textsuperscript{51} They shared the same political views and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan, 26 January 1851. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary; Seager, 387.
\item Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 26 January 1851. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
genuinely enjoyed the time they spent together. Momentarily, Alexander's death also created financial uncertainty for both Julia and John Tyler. Plantation profits had not improved appreciably since 1846, and Alexander had continued to float loans for Tyler. Fully aware that her brother's death meant financial uncertainty for John Tyler, Julia quickly asked her mother for assistance:

The President will require someone to take Alexander's place in giving him the free use of their name for his accommodation in his worldly matters . . . I hope therefore you will at once offer your name to him to continue matters as they stood between him and A. Your name only is required and he meets everything else . . . when I hear from you I shall tell the President that I had written to you to propose you should take Alexander's place in assisting him in his affairs and you unhesitatingly consented.52

Juliana was determined not to let Julia and the children want for anything, and she quickly reassured John Tyler that he had nothing to worry about. In mid February 1851 he sent installment payments on the loans owed the Gardiner family and added, "I felt great reluctance to trouble you about my affairs at all but [your] readiness in taking Alexander's place and kindness with which it was done has served to relieve me of that reluctance."53

Juliana could ease the financial uncertainty that resulted from Alexander's death, but she could not take away the pain that Julia experienced. Having enjoyed a particularly close relationship with her brother, Julia had a difficult time getting beyond the grief she felt. His sudden death reminded her of the pain she had experienced when her father died aboard the Princeton in 1844, but neither of

52 Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner as quoted in Seager, 389.
those deaths was a painful as the June 1857 death of her sister Margaret during a visit to Sherwood Forest. Margaret's death resulted more from the heavy doses of medication prescribed than from illness. Although her symptoms were no more severe than chill and digestive discomfort, her physician, Dr. Gideon Christian, did not put much stock in small doses of medication. Instead he prescribed doses of antimony and quinine heavy enough to cause Margaret's ears to ring. The powerful effects of the drugs convinced Margaret that Dr. Christian was competent. Medications that had a noticeable effect were a key factor in the relationship between many nineteenth-century physicians and their patients.\textsuperscript{54}

Even though Julia often submitted to this kind of therapy herself, she was suspicious that the prescription had killed her sister:

> Every incident of her visit to us is recalled & recalled again, and I wonder if it was designed that she should die, or whether the skill of her physician was at fault and yet she remarked to me after two or thee consultations she had that she preferred him to any other she ever consulted with. She passed away so unexpectedly to me, under the influence of a doze of morphine, that it seems as if I could secure no consultation adequate in my affliction but the knowledge that death stole upon her without producing a dread or a pang—that our loss is her great gain I must believe.

Once again the shock of death caused Julia to focus on the Christian belief that a better life awaited Margaret. With the deaths of Alexander and Margaret, Julia

had lost the brother and sister that she loved most of all. Her relationship with David, which was never strong, continued to diminish after Margaret's death.55

As she mourned the loss of her sister, Julia stopped making her annual trips to the Virginia spas or to Saratoga Springs. Without Margaret as a companion, the medicinal value of these places no longer mattered. Vacation spots also lost their appeal. Fortunately, the children provided a distraction from her grief. The end of her vacation jaunts might have been a blessing for John Tyler as he wrestled with the plantation budget. In preparation for visits to the watering holes, Julia always required expensive new dresses. Although Juliana was happy to offer support, continued dependence on her financial assistance must have been exceedingly awkward for John Tyler, even if Gardiner wealth did insure a certain standard of living.56

Although John Tyler and Juliana Gardiner did everything in their power to shelter Julia from financial worries, they could not protect her from the pain of losing loved ones or worrying about sick children. Julia was fortunate to have two people who loved her as much as they did, and she appreciated their love and did not take them for granted. Julia knew that both her mother and husband were aging and would not always be there. Aware that she would have to become self-sufficient at some point in the future, Julia became increasingly independent and honed her skills as housekeeper and mother. Throughout the remainder of John


56Seager, 420-21.
Tyler's life she maintained an image as a traditional wife but would later demonstrate tremendous talent for self-sufficiency.

During these same years Julia continued to transform herself into a southern conservative. The more she listened to her husband's political views and read newspapers critical of him, the more opinionated she became. Politically, her views mirrored his. She did not, however, confine her views to presidential politics. She focused on sectional issues as much as any other southerners. Like John Tyler, she believed that northern abolitionists misrepresented the South. By 1850 she was as loyal and as patriotic to the South as native-born southerners. Julia's growing anxiety about the sectional dispute led her to become increasingly political during the years preceding the Civil War. Like other southern women, she held strong political views, and now she was ready to defend southern institutions publicly.
VI

The State of Slavery in the South

In 1853, Julia achieved international notoriety when she published a proslavery essay, in response to an abolitionist assault from British women. Like other southern women, she accepted slavery as a fact of life and enjoyed its benefits. When she lifted her pen to write, Julia joined other proslavery apologists whose goal was to demonstrate the reasons why slavery was right. She could not hope to convert English abolitionists, but she provided a more important service for southerners. During a period when slaveholders felt most threatened, Julia reaffirmed the southern way of life in general and the institution of slavery in particular. Although Julia’s support for slavery was unwavering, her action was extraordinary because she had not written a formal essay since her days as a school girl, if ever. Some newspapers including New York’s *Albany Journal* argued that John Tyler actually wrote the essay. Although Julia borrowed many of his ideas and arguments, there is no reason to doubt her authorship.¹ Margaret was a guest at Sherwood Forest when Julia drafted the essay, and she reported that "authorship" and "intense thinking" had left her sister quite upset.² Although Julia was anxious about her composition, she did not lack talent. She was a bright woman who spent a good portion of her time reading journals and novels and


²Margaret Gardiner Beeckman to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 25 January 1853, as quoted in Seager, 403.
writing letters to family members and friends. Her personal correspondence demonstrates strong political views and a good understanding of public events. Undoubtedly, she was well informed about the issues and arguments surrounding the debate over slavery.

Harriet Beecher Stowe generated a new wave of anti-slavery controversy when she published *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in 1851-52, and it was into that fray that Julia entered. Stowe’s novel, which was popular in the North and Great Britain, evoked new resolve among abolitionists on both sides of the ocean. Deeply troubled by *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Britain’s Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, decided to make an appeal to the conscience of American women on the topic of slavery. Cooper, a prominent philanthropist, drafted a short memorial called "The Affectionate and Christian Address of Many Thousands of The Women of England to Their Sisters, The Women of The United States of America." It was also called the Stafford House Address. When Cooper completed the text, he sent it to British newspapers without consulting any women.³ By creating the illusion of female authors, he hoped to stave off charges of political motivation. Part of his plan was to have Harriet Elizabeth Georgiana Leveson-Gower, the Duchess of Sutherland, sponsor the document. She in turn organized a committee to gather women’s signatures throughout

---

England and Scotland. By March 1853, 526,848 women had signed.\(^4\)

When published, the Stafford House Address provoked an outpouring of anti-British reaction in the United States. One of the first responses came from a gathering of American women meeting in Milan, Italy.\(^5\) But only two southern women responded: Louisa Susanna Cheves McCord of South Carolina and Julia Gardiner Tyler. A veteran writer and translator of the work of French political economist Frederic Bastiat, McCord published her essay in *DeBow's Review*, but it did not attract as much attention as Julia Gardiner Tyler's "A Letter to The Duchess of Sutherland and Ladies of England in Reply to the 'Christian Address' On the Subject of Slavery in the Southern States" which appeared in the *Richmond Enquirer* on January 28, 1853.\(^6\) The London *Times* reprinted Julia's essay in its February 15 edition, and *The Southern Literary Messenger* also carried a reprint in its February issue.\(^7\)

Julia recognized that "some one of the vast number of those to whom [the memorial] is addressed" had a responsibility to respond, and she was well-suited for the task. There were few southern women who were better known.

---


\(^5\)"England," *The New York Times*, 22 January 1853. According to this article, the American women suggested that English ladies had reforms to accomplish at home before interfering in the problems of the United States. This was one of the standard responses to the Stafford House address.

\(^6\)Fox-Genovese, 245.

\(^7\)Pugh, 193; Fox-Genovese, 245.
Additionally, she had travelled extensively in Europe and was familiar with social conditions in England and other parts of the continent. Julia also understood the place of gender in both American and European societies, and she began her essay by making that point. Denying that her southern sisters had a role in the public debate over slavery, Julia noted: "Woman in the United States, with but few exceptions, confines herself within that sphere for which . . . God . . . designed her." By emphasizing women's traditional sphere, she hoped to interject a moral argument that was well-known to southerners. The strategy was brilliant, but the implication was patently untrue. As Eugene D. Genovese has noted, "women gave formal assent to their own alleged political incapacity," but kept themselves well-informed and pressed men on the issues. According to Julia, the southern woman focused solely on the family circle and extended her influence over "the relations of life, as wife, mother [and] mistress." The Stafford House memorial challenged her to take a position which would "cast a doubt on her fidelity" and possibly "dethrone her" from an exalted position. As wife, mother, and mistress, the southern woman was loyal and would never engage in criticism of her homeland.10

This debate took place during a period when some American women

---

8Julia Gardiner Tyler, "A Letter to The Duchess of Sutherland and Ladies of England In Reply To Their 'Christian Address' On The Subject of Slavery In The Southern States," *Southern Literary Messenger* (February 1853), 3.

9Eugene D. Genovese, "Toward a Kinder and Gentler America," 130.

10Julia Gardiner Tyler, "A Letter to The Duchess of Sutherland and Ladies of England in reply To Their 'Christian Address' on the subject of Slavery In The Southern States," *Southern Literary Messenger* (February 1853), 3.
abolitionists had raised fundamental questions about the role of women in society. As a result, the idealization of southern womanhood was an essential component of Julia's essay. Eugene Genovese and others have noted the importance of women's appropriate roles in the proslavery politics of the antebellum South. Planets were like Old Testament patriarchs who lived together with their wives and their slaves. "Since women were generally acknowledged to be in some sense inferior to men, they were analogous to Negroes: subjection to despotic authority was in their interest." Southern culture emphasized total masculinity and total femininity that encouraged male dominance and female submission. The defensive South threatened from outside had to minimize internal threats to its stability; and for many southerners changes in the status of either women or slaves signaled the downfall of an entire society. Julia's defense of an ideal southern woman who did not interfere in politics was a myth. The planter class did everything in its power to diminish the distance between myth and reality, and that was one of Julia's goals. She used her defense of slavery to justify the role and


life-style of traditional southern women.\textsuperscript{15}

Julia castigated the English women for placing their signatures on a document prepared by newspaper editors, and she charged that they had done a grave disservice to themselves by doing so without the permission of their husbands. English critics of the Stafford House address agreed. Worse yet, they also believed the Duchess of Sutherland, Lady John Russell, Viscountess Palmerston, the Countess of Carlisle, and others had compromised the exalted positions of the noblemen to whom they were married.\textsuperscript{16} Comparing her southern sisters to European women, Julia insisted that southern ladies deferred to their husbands in all matters. Additionally, she praised the education of southern women and called them the equals of "any females on earth:"

They have peculiar opportunities of acquiring knowledge in regard to the public concerns of the world. Politics is almost universally the theme of conversation among the men, in all their coteries and social gatherings, and women would be stupid indeed, if they did not gather much information from this abundant source. Hence they are not ignorant of the rapid growth of their beloved country, or of the promises of its early future.\textsuperscript{17}

Julia's argument was odd for a woman who pored through newspapers every day in search of political commentaries about her husband. Well-educated southern women had as much access to news sources about world affairs as the men to


\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 4.
whom they were married. Although somewhat disingenuous, Julia's interpretation of the ideal wife was a good rhetorical device which would have evoked very little objection in 1853.

Women did play important roles in southern society, and Julia wanted to make that point as clearly as possible. She informed English critics that "it is the province" of southern women "to preside over the domestic economy of the estate and plantations of their husbands." In her enumeration of the various responsibilities of slaveholding women, Julia argued that her southern sisters treated their slaves humanely:

> It is emphatically their [southern women's] province to visit the sick, and attend to the comfort of all the laborers upon such estates; and it is felt to be but a poor compliment to the women of the South, to suppose it necessary to introduce other superintendence than their own over the condition of their dependents and servants.18

Care of sick laborers was often an onerous chore which burdened slaveholding women. Aside from the time and energy invested in slaves' sickrooms, some mistresses worried and grieved about the health of their charges. No one knew the emotional strain of nursing ill slaves any better than a plantation mistress, and Julia had seen her share of sick servants.19 She was defensive about slaveholding women's care of their servants, and asserted that they did not take this responsibility lightly. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has written that the care of sick slaves was a double worry which reminded the plantation mistress of her

---

18Ibid., 3.

"particular responsibilities" to her family's prosperity.20

The Stafford House Address required Julia to refute the charge that the peculiar institution denied slaves "the sanctity of marriage . . . [and] separates at the will of the master, the wife from the husband, and the children from the parents." It also criticized southern planters for failing to instruct slaves in the Christian religion. While acknowledging that England had imposed slavery on the American colonies, the Earl of Shaftesbury tried to get American women to oppose slavery by appealing to their understanding of religious values and nineteenth century morality.21 Although Julia responded to all of these points, she primarily argued that Harriet Beecher Stowe was poor source of information about black slavery in the southern states. Copies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were certainly available in eastern Virginia, but Julia never admitted to reading the novel and probably had not. However, discrediting Harriet Beecher Stowe as a northern writer who had used artistic license to create a fictitious image of slavery was easy to do without having firsthand knowledge of the novel. Julia offered an interpretation of American national progress, world politics, and the history of slavery that was popular among nineteenth-century Americans. According to her understanding, other confederacies had existed before the United States, but each had perished as a result of foreign machinations. Therefore, American women had a responsibility "to look with suspicion . . . on all interference in our domestic concerns." Julia believed that foreign governments

20Fox-Genovese, 129.

were jealous of the growing United States population and the nation's potential as a future world leader:

Governments and countries which are now looked upon as stars of the first magnitude, will ere long, if the United States roll on in their present orbit, be secondary and tertiary in the political hemisphere. This is as thoroughly known by us as by you, women of England, and therefore you should not be in the slightest degree surprised at the suspicion with which your address is regarded by all the thinking women, not only of the South, but of the whole Union.22

Julia viewed slavery as the one topic "on which there is a possibility of wrecking the bark of the Union." Interference from northern abolitionists was dangerous enough, but agitation by British meddlers was a far greater threat. By suggesting the possibility of foreign threats to American national unity, she hoped to garner northern support for her argument.

In the text of the Stafford House Address, the Earl of Shaftesbury blamed England for inflicting slavery on the American colonies. Much to the dismay of the British public, Julia agreed and expanded on the theme. Some English critics conceded that some American colonies had passed acts abolishing the slave trade which the Crown disallowed, but they refused to accept the charge that England had forced the colonies to enslave Africans. One writer, who took exception to the Stafford House address, clearly expressed his reservations: "The proposed address imputes to our own forefathers the guilt of having compelled the American colonies to import African slaves. I do not believe the fact to be so."23 Julia argued that the charge was historically accurate, and that England

22Ibid., 4.

23"Academicus" to the Editor. 1 December 1852, *The Times of London*.
had prevented various colonies from later passing legislation to abolish the slave trade:

The colony of Virginia, and, I believe, most of the other colonies, were constant and earnest in their remonstrances; and one of the causes set forth in the Declaration of Independence, as prepared and written by a son of Virginia, was a continuance of the slave trade by the mother country, despite of all remonstrances on the part of the colonies. Thus . . . England not only permitted but encouraged the slave trade, for a period of a century and a half as a means of swelling her coffers.24

After linking both Crown and Parliament to the Atlantic slave trade, Julia argued that their primary interest was the sound of "perfect music . . . because it was the music of gold told into the treasury." Absolving American colonists from guilt, she observed that the American Revolution was a war to end the slave trade.25

This was true for Virginia but not for the lower South. Julia's logic was fallacious. The United States did not abolish the slave trade until twenty years after the war had ended. Although this interpretation of American history offended many British citizens, they took it in stride. They simply blamed the Duchess of Sutherland and her followers for inviting these insults.

While Julia's understanding of history was not perfect, her rhetorical style was effective. The accuracy of her historical interpretations did not matter. After all, Americans generally shared this view of history. Since English women had initiated the debate, Julia believed she had free license to express her outrage, and that is exactly what she did. She included as many inflammatory statements as possible. The conclusion of the historical section provides a perfect example of her technique. She alleged that parliament's sudden concern for suffering slaves

24Tyler letter, 4.
25Ibid., 5.
in the New World merely resulted from England’s lost of the slave trade:

The great slave market in which England had enjoyed a monopoly, was thus lost to her; and from that moment she began to discover that there was something rather immoral in the traffic. Before, the slave ship was a stately argosy laden with treasury. The groans of its unhappy victims could not be heard above the surges of the ocean. Soon after, a faint cry could be heard, borne on the winds from Africa’s coast.

Very little of Julia’s essay focused on the Earl of Shaftesbury’s main points: the failure to provide Christian education for slaves and the forced separation of slave families. She insisted that the South did provide for the religious instruction of slaves. She failed, however, to separate worship services from religious education, arguing that southern blacks regularly flocked to places of Sabbath worship and listened to edifying discourses. Julia did not understand that southern initiation of blacks into Christianity was hardly religious education, since most Sunday schools provided only oral instruction. Protestant evangelists have always held that religious education enabled Christians to discern the will of God through reading and reflection on the scriptures, but that was not possible in Virginia where teaching blacks to read was illegal.

Although Julia did not argue that slavery was a positive good, she did believe it was just and humane. Harriet Beecher Stowe had emphasized the cruelty of slavery, and Julia wanted to counter that interpretation. In order to accomplish this goal, she invited English critics to visit the home of the typical southern woman, where nothing would be more obvious than the “well-clothed and happy domestics who welcome your arrival, and heap upon you every comfort
during your sojourn under the roofs of their masters."²⁶ Because Julia believed her own servants were well treated, she assumed that all southern slaves were. She could not accept the idea of sadistic planters. Additionally, she strongly rejected the allegation that an internal slave trade divided black families. "Even if you are horror-stricken at the highly colored picture of human distress, incident to the separation husband and wife, and parents, and children . . ." this is "a thing, by the way, of rare occurrence among us."²⁷

One fugitive slave and author took exception to this point. If Mrs. Tyler's "domestic hearth is surrounded with slaves," Harriet Jacobs argued, "ere long before this she has opened her eyes to the evils of slavery." In a letter to the New York Tribune, Jacobs noted that her own two children were sold at ages two and four. Additionally, she reported that her sister had rescued their own mother from the auction block by agreeing to submit to the sexual demands of their master. Worse yet, the slaveholder sold Harriet's sister after she bore him two children. Slave sales were not the rare occurrences that Julia claimed, and no one knew that any better than Harriet Jacobs.²⁸

Although slave sales at Sherwood Forest were rare, Julia knew about one case. A few months before writing her essay, she described the sale of a former slave named Henry who visited Sherwood Forest in the spring of 1852. Tyler had

²⁶Ibid.
²⁷Ibid.
sold him in 1844. Now a barber who had raised enough money to purchase his own freedom from a slaveholder in Georgia, Henry wanted "to see & talk to his [former] master" and "could not restrain his tears." Having been John Tyler's body servant before his marriage to Julia, Henry pined when consigned to Sherwood Forest after the wedding. He had tried to make his way to Washington to be with Tyler, but the authorities arrested him shortly after he left the plantation. An angry John Tyler punished Henry severely. Without listening to the slave's explanation, he sold him into slavery in the lower South. Ironically, Henry's new master in Georgia, who was more benevolent, allowed him to purchase his freedom. Now Tyler scrutinized Henry's freedmen's papers suspiciously before deciding not to have him arrested again. Two of Henry's vouchers convinced Tyler that he was telling the truth. A far more trusting man than Tyler, Henry believed he could "die happy" after having seen his old master again.29

Genuinely impressed by Henry's motives for visiting Sherwood Forest, Julia provided the best interpretation of the meeting between the two men. Henry's obvious affection for John Tyler touched her deeply, but she was oblivious to the pain the man experienced during the period following his arrest. Harriet Jacobs was mistaken in her assumption: Julia was never fully aware of the horrors of slavery. Ordinary practices at Sherwood Forest shaped her evaluation of slavery, and Henry was the only Tyler slave on record who ever received such a harsh punishment. His continued affection for John Tyler colored Julia's understanding


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
of the circumstances. Since the sale of slaves at Sherwood Forest was a rare occurrence she honestly believed that other planters seldom sold their servants. But she could not speak for the rest of the South.

Julia reassured the English women, however, that Americans did have a solution for the problem of slavery, a plan that involved the coast of Africa. "The footprints of our policy are seen in the colonies there established, already become independent States—in the voluntary emancipation of slaves by our citizens as preparatory for emigration to Africa." She took cues from John Tyler on the topic of colonization. As a member of the Virginia Colonization Society, he favored emigration of emancipated blacks to Liberia, but Tyler never arranged for manumission or colonization of a single one of his slaves. In her essay, Julia echoed the primary reason for his support of colonization—the removal of free blacks from the state of Virginia.30

In part Julia's perceptions about slavery resulted from her comparison of American slaves with white laboring classes around the world. Having spent most of her life in the North, she knew better than most southern whites that black slaves had certain advantages over white wage laborers. At the very least slaves could count on a place to live and adequate food. Free, white laborers lived in a world of economic uncertainties, and Julia emphasized this point. If English women wanted to exercise their philanthropy, they could begin by helping free peasants on the streets of London.

Julia's European travels and her New York background enabled her to cite

30 Ibid., 7-8.
one disadvantaged group that needed British benevolence. She directed the Duchess of Sutherland to look to the starving population in Ireland as an example of a people who deserved the philanthropy of her followers:

Women of England! go thither with your tender charities. There, on the roadside, sinks an attenuated and exhausted mother, still straining her perishing child to her breast, while the unhappy husband and father, himself foodless and raimentless, sheds drops of agony over the heartrending scene. Spare from the well-fed negroes of these States, one drop of your super abounding sympathy, to pour into the bitter cup which is overrunning with sorrow and with tears.

Continuing to chide the British women for turning their backs on the Irish, she added, "religious toleration is but an unmeaning phrase with the people of Great Britain. A difference in creed has been the death-blow to Ireland." Her remark was harsh, but true.31

Julia also directed the attention of the English women to London's "100,000 persons who rose in the morning without knowing where or how they were to obtain their daily bread." Julia remembered the images of poverty from her 1841 trip to London and spoke with authority:

Go, my good Duchess of Sutherland, on an embassy of mercy to the poor, the stricken, the hungry and the naked of your own land—cast in their laps the superflux of your enormous wealth; a single jewel from your hair, a single gem from your dress would relieve many a poor female of England, who is now cold, and shivering, and destitute.32

If English women could not find sufficient objects for their charity in London, Julia suggested that they look to other places on the European continent. Observing the plight of Russian serfs, she argued that English women would not

---

31Ibid., 7.

32Ibid., 6.
dare interfere with the domestic institutions of another European nation controlled by a powerful monarch and a ruling aristocracy.

In spite of her pointed statements, Julia left the door open for friendship between the United States and Britain. She stressed a common heritage and the necessity of continued trade relations between the two nations. In the South, Julia noted, people were particularly proud of their English ancestry and wanted strong ties with Great Britain. She warned, however, that friendship between the two nations would not be possible if English people insisted on interfering in the domestic affairs of the United States. In contrast to the Stafford House address, which simply appealed to the conscience of American women, Julia's response was sharp and confrontational. Without knowing that a man had written the memorial for the English women, one writer to the New York Times focused on the impolite tone of Julia's reply:

Inasmuch as I do from my soul admire, venerate and love that which is gentle, Christian and womanly in woman, whether American or British born, so do I abhor that which is its opposite—the which I believe Mrs. Tyler's letter smacks of. A number of English women . . . [met] at a Duchess's house, and . . . impelled by womanly pity . . . wrote a timorous and humble appeal to "their American sisters," praying them, as wives and mothers to use their influence to mitigate some few of the inevitable consequences of bondage. A touching, feminine letter throughout, no phrase or word indicative of reproach or offence, and how answered by Mrs. Tyler?33

Having taken a public stand on slavery, Julia was now subject to the same kinds of criticisms as male politicians.

For several weeks in early 1853, newspapers reported reactions to Julia's

---

essay. She eagerly scanned every journal she could get her hands on, looking for criticisms of her discourse. Julia noted that the New York *Commercial Advertiser* was "particularly malicious" to her, and she wondered if it was "in the pay of foreign governments." Thomas Ritchie, former editor of the *Richmond Enquirer*, informed Julia that her essay was the main topic of conversation in Washington, causing her to conclude, "in all quarters it no doubt is the same. Even the lunatics have got hold of it" she reported to her mother, "which is the best proof of its popularity."34

Congratulatory notes poured into Sherwood Forest shortly after Julia’s polemic appeared in print, and more than fifty newspapers (both North and South) gave favorable critiques. Nowhere was Julia more popular than in the South where she quickly acquired heroine status. Southern women’s organizations sent their praises to her. 35 John Tyler was particularly proud of Julia’s achievement and noted:

Rely upon it that the golden rule of life after all is in Mrs. Tyler’s expression in her letter to the Duchess of Sutherland, for each person to attend to his own business and to let his neighbors alone. Woe unto that [one] who shall violate this rule of life. Better for them that they had never been born.36

Tyler’s remark summarized the sentiments of every southerner who resented interference with the peculiar institution. But there was nothing that Julia or any

---

34Julia G. Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, 14 February 1853. Tyler Papers. Library of Congress.

35Seager, 405.


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
other proslavery apologist could say or write to silence abolitionists.

In light of the wide acceptance of Julia’s essay in newspapers and journals, many southerners concluded that she had effectively countered the influence of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s book. Given the extraordinary success of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which had a circulation of a million copies in England within the first year of publication, such beliefs were naive. Of Julia’s family members, only Margaret was skeptical. She would remain unconvinced of the success of Julia’s essay until it attracted as many readers as Harriet Beecher Stowe’s book had, she declared. As the Gardiners and Tylers pondered the effects of Julia’s essay, the Duchess of Sutherland and the Earl of Shaftesbury honored Harriet Beecher Stowe in London. They received her at Stafford House on May 7, 1853, along with ranking political and religious leaders.37

Aside from the momentary attention she received, Julia set the tone for other American responses. Like Julia, Louisa Susanna McCord defended the traditional view of southern womanhood while challenging English women to focus on their own poor. Many American newspaper editors also picked up on the theme of British insensitivity to the needy in their own country.38 Like Julia’s essay, most American responses eventually appeared in English newspapers, but none diminished the popularity of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in Great Britain. As world opinion shifted against slavery, Julia and other slaveholding whites had reason to become increasingly defensive.

37Hodder, 438; Seager, 405.

38Hodder, 438.
Deeply concerned that the issue of slavery would lead to disunion, Julia became more attentive to political developments during the years that led up to the Civil War. Part of her fascination stemmed from vicarious involvement in the sectional debate through John Tyler, but Julia's interest was greater than that of a dutiful wife. She possessed strong conservative views which were distinctly her own, and she had already demonstrated her ability to articulate her opinions clearly. Opportunities for southern women to take public stands were rare because social conventions prevented it. Ironically, she had defended this position in her polemic and had no other choice except to live according to her own words. Always ambitious, Julia excitedly watched her husband take an increasingly active role in politics during the months that led up to disunion. John Tyler was sixty-nine years old in 1859, and the chances of his rising to national political power again were slim. Although Julia would have liked to have seen her husband become the national hero who saved the Union, she was also a realist. John Tyler would do what he could for the country, and she would remain at his side and share his experiences. She continued to follow political developments in the newspapers as faithfully as her husband did, and John Tyler freely discussed politics with her. Julia would do her part for the South by setting the example of the ideal southern woman. But the excitement and notoriety generated by her public discourse on slavery was an experience she enjoyed and would never forget.
The Crisis of Southern Nationalism

Politics increasingly distracted Julia as the sectional dispute intensified, but hearth and home remained the center of her life. A house full of growing children demanded both time and attention. As each child moved out of the toddler stage, Julia made plans for his or her early education by employing private tutors and nurses who had special talents, and these teachers were often unique. At first she had depended on the French nurse named Hortense to introduce the children to spoken French. When Hortense left Sherwood Forest, Julia hired Caroline who was more of a teacher than a nurse. Her major responsibility was to help the children achieve fluency in French. Caroline's skills impressed Julia who soon boasted that two-year old Fitzwalter understood both English and French. Nine-year old Julie picked up French so quickly that she was soon able to "talk altogether in the language with Caroline." In 1859, Julia also engaged a German music teacher to work daily with her daughter, and she arranged for the children to receive English reading lessons each day.¹

During that same year Julia reported that her daughter was attending school, and her progress was impressive. Julia's expectations were high. Each week day Julie faced an intense schedule which included school, music, and a long French lesson with Caroline. Since Julia believed intensive study was the way to

¹Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 12 April 1858. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
achieve a good knowledge of the language, she insisted upon Julie spending her weekends in the company of Caroline, walking and playing exclusively in French. Like her own mother, Julia took an interest in all of her children's education, but she viewed Julie's education as her special responsibility. Following the pattern established in the Gardiner household, she regarded plans for the boys' education as the responsibility of John Tyler.²

The combination of schools, tutors, and slave nurses enabled Julia to keep abreast of public affairs without neglecting her children. As a southerner, she viewed the political affairs of 1859 as extremely troubling but believed the sectional crisis would solidify southern opinion and result in a more favorable appraisal of her husband's administration. The March 1859 issue of DeBow's Review labeled John Tyler as the nation's only states' rights president, and other southern spokesmen agreed. According to Julia, Prosper N. Wetmore, a New York politician and one of Tyler's old supporters, mentioned him as a possible presidential candidate for 1860. John Tyler stood ready to do what he could to promote southern interests, while Julia was hopeful that they would once again be in the political spotlight, but her husband's health and age severely limited his personal ambitions. Tyler's intellect was as sharp as ever, but he lacked physical stamina. Yet his reaction to the sectional crisis fueled Julia's ambitions and her

dreams of retuning to the center of government.\textsuperscript{3}

In 1859 preservation of the union was absolutely essential to Julia. Unlike most Americans, she belonged to both regions of the country and disunion threatened to destroy her world. As Virginians, both John and Julia were disturbed by the rapidly deteriorating relations between North and South. However, in 1859 their views were still evolving. They ardently defended states' rights but had not yet committed themselves to secession. Like most members of the planter class, they denied that the South shared any of the blame for the sectional dispute. In late November 1859, Julia reported that the "treasonable discourses" of many northerners had convinced her husband that disunion would soon come. Even though Julia continued to hold New York friends and family in high regard, she sometimes forgot that many people in her home state were sympathetic to the southern position and that most northerners were not abolitionists. Like other southerners, Julia became increasingly exercised about northern plots aimed at destroying the domestic institutions of the South. At least one fanatical abolitionist provided some basis for her concern.\textsuperscript{4}

When John Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry jolted Virginia during 1859, citizens in the state argued that northerners would continue to use violent tactics in the fight against slavery. No one found Brown's raid any more outrageous than


\textsuperscript{4}Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 10 November 1859. Tyler Family Papers, College of William & Mary.
Julia, who was also furious about Lydia Maria Child's response to it. Both an abolitionist and a pacifist, Child carefully distanced herself from Brown's violence, but she asked Governor Henry Wise for permission to travel to Harpers Ferry to nurse the old man. Julia had a difficult time understanding how any woman could regard someone who had led such a violent assault against the South with such compassion. Wise, an old friend of the Tylers, asked Child not to come because he feared her presence would only cause more violence. Delighted with the governor's response, Julia sent her mother a copy of Governor Wise's letter to "Mrs. Child who loves and blesses Brown the murderer so much."5

But Child was a only a minor distraction; John Brown was much more important. Like other Virginians, Julia viewed his impending execution as a vindication for the South. "In a few days," she wrote, "old Brown will reap the miserable consequence of his shameful outrage and yield his life for those he has taken." Julia's disdain for John Brown equaled that of any southern white man, but she only expressed her views to other family members. Since she trusted Governor Wise and other southern men to handle the Brown affair, she saw no reason to write letters to government officials. Instead she continued to seek answers about the sectional crisis from both newspapers and John Tyler as she pondered the future of the South.6

---


Julia continued to fear disunion, but the reactions of conservative white northerners to the Harpers Ferry incident impressed her. Many northern newspaper editors condemned Brown’s raid and criticized the abolitionist movement which now had a new hero. And Julia noted that her husband was particularly happy with an article in the New York Express which was totally sympathetic to the Southern position. Many political leaders and residents of New York City were openly sympathetic to the South. In 1857, Francis Boole had offered a resolution to the Board of Aldermen that expressed the affection of New Yorkers for South Carolina, and there was a contingent of southern sympathizers in the city throughout the Civil War. Julia also was optimistic about unionist rallies sponsored by conservative elites in the cities of Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. She read too much into these rallies, and at least momentarily, concluded that disunion would be unnecessary. But like other southerners, she was unsure about the size of the abolitionist movement or the will of northern political leaders to persist in their opposition to southern principles. By focusing on northern conservatives, Julia failed to understand the actual impact of John Brown’s raid on other northern citizens. James M. McPherson has written that the reaction to Brown’s execution in northern communities was often extraordinarily sympathetic. “Church bells tolled, minute guns fired solemn salutes, ministers preached sermons of commemoration;

---

7Ibid.

8Ernest A. McKay, The Civil War and New York City (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 32.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
thousands bowed in silent reverence for the martyr to liberty.\textsuperscript{9} But the noisy accolades of the abolitionist community may have muted more widespread anti-Brown sentiments.

Julia could not permit herself to believe that sentiments like those of Lydia Maria Child were commonplace in northern communities. Julia did experience great anxiety about the North as public events unfolded, and she had good reason to worry about political divisions in the nation because the crisis had already resulted in a difference of opinions within the Gardiner clan. All of Julia's relatives supported the conservative union meetings in New York except her brother David, and he also refused to endorse a document that denounced abolitionist excesses. His position came as a surprise to both she and her mother. Although puzzled by David's position, Julia did not focus on it because by mid-December she concluded that the danger of disunion had passed.\textsuperscript{10} Judging from the tone of northern newspapers, she concluded that all "the best minds [of the North] are really with the South." Julia had already relegated John Brown to history and discounted the effects of his action on the northern population.

By February 1860, she realized that only the John Brown phase of the crisis had passed, nothing else had changed. The election of a new speaker of the House of Representatives was the latest problem for the people of Charles City County, Virginia, and Julia was particularly upset by the candidacy of John


\textsuperscript{10}Seager, 430-431.
Sherman of Ohio. An ex-Whig and a moderate, Sherman did not have strong feelings about the slavery issue, but he had signed an endorsement of an abridged version of Hinton Helper's antislavery book, *The Impending Crisis*. After a painful and protracted struggle which nearly brought the House of Representatives to violence, Sherman withdrew his name. When the Congress finally elected William Pennington of New Jersey, who had voted for the Fugitive Slave Act ten years earlier, residents of Charles City County expressed their relief. Julia, who viewed the contest as a major problem wrote, "How much further matters will go towards dissolution of the Union is at present in the dark."\(^1\)

As the nation inched toward disunion, she imagined northern treachery all around her. While attending a Richmond party in honor of Christopher G. Memminger of South Carolina, Julia witnessed a curious event involving someone dressed like a Roman Catholic priest. The party at the Exchange Hotel was a grand affair to which a numerous government officials had been invited. Black waiters served the party, and one guest observed the alleged priest stop several of the waiters individually and engage them in conversation. Since Catholic priests were not uncommon in the vicinity of the Exchange Hotel, his presence had not aroused the curiosity of anyone until he began talking to blacks. The same guest who had observed the encounters between the priest and the waiters questioned the slaves about what the priest had said to them. Each of them answered that he had asked:

\(^1\)Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 8 February 1860. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary; McPherson, 200-201; Potter, 387-88.
why they did not go into the ballroom & enjoy themselves like the rest [of the people] there; that they had as good a right to take part in the dancing & the amusement as any who were there, and if he was in their place he would not hesitate to ask a lady to dance.

Although the priest denied the allegation, the guest, who interrogated the slaves, caned him severely. According to Julia, "The sham priest was a person from Massachusetts, who left Richmond the next morning after the fracas, and so I suppose there will continue to be many a wolf in sheep’s clothing."12

Through most of 1860 she worried about political developments yet continued to hope that disunion would not occur. Conversations with friends in Charles City County increased Julia’s doubts, for some of her neighbors were already moving toward secession. By December, she reported that Dr. James Selden was in the process of deciding whether to move his plantation to the lower South. Having recently returned from a visit to Alabama, he told Julia that the South was ripe for secession. She found the news distressing and continued to hope that northern conservatives would work with southerners to end the crisis. Again Julia’s reading of the some northern newspapers reassured her "that the Union on a right and just basis will be preserved." By this time, however, some extremist women had begun to make their views known, and they were no more comforting than Dr. Selden’s report. According to Julia, "South Carolina ladies say they would rather be widows of secessionists than wives of submissionists! and

---

that they will never again attend a ball in the United States."¹³

Julia was as patriotic as any other southern woman, but she did not agree with foolish or radical statements. Yet the South Carolina women had weighed the consequences of disunion as thoroughly as Julia had. Their use of the word "widows" suggests that they did not believe disunion could be accomplished without war, and many regarded civil war as the only means of defending southern honor. As George C. Rable has written, southern women did not view either disunion or civil war as abstractions; they fully understood the dangers. Unlike the South Carolina women, however, Julia lived in Virginia where union sentiments were strong until the spring of 1861. As an adopted Virginian, she was less hot-tempered than her South Carolinian sisters. With close relatives in the North, the consequences of civil war were too horrible for her to think about.¹⁴

Both Julia and John Tyler had another reason for being uneasy about disunion. As a former presidential couple they had shared a genuine commitment to the entire nation. Although John Tyler favored states' rights, he had no desire to see the country divided and decided to do everything in his power to find a way of saving the nation without compromising the position of the South. Ten years before the election of Abraham Lincoln, Tyler advocated sectional harmony and supported the Compromise of 1850. During the controversy over the Kansas-

---


Nebraska Act, he argued that Congress did not have the power to exclude slavery from the territories. According to Oliver Chitwood, Tyler believed southern delegates "had acted unwisely in seceding from the Charleston [Democratic] Convention in 1860," and the difference "between the two factions of the party were a mere abstraction." By the time South Carolina seceded in December, 1860, he had intensified his efforts to prevent disunion. As he worked to formulate a peace plan, Tyler shared his ideas with Julia because he valued her opinion and could always count on her to listen and react honestly. In early January 1861, he began privately lobbying members of the Virginia State legislature to have that body request a national peace conference. Although Daniel W. Crofts credits Unionist Democrat James Barbour and Unionist Whig George W. Summers for the conference, John Tyler was the man who devised the original plan which called for a conference of delegates from "twelve border states, six slave and six free." Inclusion of delegates from all of the states would make the conference unwieldy and result in the kind of impasse experienced by the Congress, and Tyler wanted to avoid that. If he could get the border states to agree on a solution to the crisis, they could subsequently convince the rest of the states to work to preserve the union. Governor John Letcher and the Virginia legislature disagreed. Instead they wanted a convention of all of the states and required John Tyler's compliance if he intended to represent Virginia at the conference. He was unhappy with this development, but Julia believed that the

peace conference offered the best opportunity for saving the nation.16

Julia worried about her husband as the time for the peace convention drew near. Already seventy years old in 1860, John Tyler was very frail and suffered with stomach problems. When he traveled to Washington on January 22, 1861, to confer with President James Buchanan, Tyler was sick, but commitment to country was more important than an upset stomach. Buchanan was struggling to find a way to respond to the standoff with South Carolina over Fort Sumter, and Tyler wanted to ask the President to delay action until after the peace conference met in early February. Tyler convinced Julia that the crisis required him go to Washington in spite of his illness. As a result of her concern, she sent Gardie along to look after him and to serve "as a bearer of dispatches or communications between his Father & the President." Convinced that "the excitement of conversation always agrees with him," she hoped that the endless political discussions at the convention would serve to improve his health. Concerns about an infant and the five other children prevented Julia from accompanying Tyler to Washington this time, but she did plan to join him there in February. For now the best thing she could do was to make sure that he had ample supplies of medication before leaving home. Prior to his departure, she administered *hydrargyrum cum creta*, a mercury compound.17


Although genuinely worried about her husband, Julia was unable to prevent her own personal ambitions from surfacing. When Governor Letcher sent an official dispatch to Sherwood Forest to authorize John Tyler "to request Mr. Buchanan to stay all his proceedings in relation to the impending crisis until a meeting can occur between Virginia and such states as will come forward," she could scarcely contain her excitement. Julia was also pleased that the state legislature had commissioned her husband as one of five representatives of Virginia at the peace convention. As the revival of Tyler's political prominence continued she noted:

Today I was waited on by one of a committee & presented with a letter to be forwarded to the P[resident] announcing him as unanimously nominated today by the people of his District—Charles City, James City & New Kent Co[unty]ies] to represent them in the convention of the State to be held in Richmond on the 13th of February. He will now be there in the treble capacity of special adviser [sic] with the President of the United States, one of the State's ambassadors & one of the people's representatives in Convention. Honor enough to gratify the most ambitious! The seceding states, on hearing that he is conferring with Mr. Buchanan, will stay I am sure out of respect to him.18

Always referring to her husband as the President and unwilling to give James Buchanan more than the title "Mister," Julia expected too much of John Tyler and even more of the seceding states. She continued to hope that her husband would emerge as the hero who saved the Union.

After concluding his meetings with Buchanan, John Tyler returned home for a brief rest before the opening of the peace conference. On the second of February, Julia accompanied him to Washington. This time Gardie remained

home, and they took two other children along—twelve year old Alex and eight-month old Pearl. While in Washington, Julia required the assistance of one of their slaves named Fanny. She left the other children in the care of Tyler’s niece Maria and plantation nurses. Even with the assistance of a slave woman, the baby would restrict some of her activities in Washington.

In spite of domestic concerns, Julia immediately became fascinated with the work of the peace convention, but Juliana Gardiner was suspicious of her motives. She concluded that Julia’s sole purpose for going to Washington was to indulge in the round of winter parties. Ignoring the accusation, Julia reminded her mother that it was important for her to be on hand during "such a trying & exciting time [for] the President." Unconvinced, Juliana sent a box of gowns for Julia to wear to Washington parties. There was no point in arguing with her, and Julia did not try. Instead she simply responded by saying, "If I have the occasion I will wear the articles contained in [the box]." Reaffirming her own avid interest in politics, Julia noted that she had one single interest and that was to observe and listen to the proceedings of the convention. "Perhaps I am here during the last days of the Republic! Everything in the political world is calculated to interest me and I don’t expect gay entertainments under such circumstance." Julia’s more important reason for going to Washington was domestic. John Tyler continued to struggle with his health, and she was there as wife and nurse. Everyone at the conference noticed his illness. Julia gave him doses of hydrargyrum cum creta and encouraged
him to get as much rest as possible.\textsuperscript{19}

In spite of John Tyler's illness, Julia could hardly contain her excitement over his new importance. She noted that he was the center of attention, and everyone who gathered around treated him with deference. "They will make him Pres[ident] of this convention I presume from what I hear." Whenever John Tyler was the center of attention, Julia shared those moments with him. More than anything, she had missed the public prominence that was part of being the wife of the President of the United States. Although John Tyler's present role was an unofficial one, Julia would not complain. She would enjoy the praise and the honor while it lasted. Always optimistic, she hoped for more:

There seems to be a general looking to [the President] by those anxious to save the Union. I wish it possible for him to succeed in overcoming all obstacles. They all say if through him it cannot be accomplished it could not through any one else. Mr. Barringer of North Carolina said to me today in the cars, President Tyler has had the great happiness accorded him of living to see himself fully appreciated. All party feelings have faded away and his old enemies are among his warmest friends.\textsuperscript{20}

John Tyler had an impossible job. Before the peace conference convened, South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, and Georgia had all passed ordinances of secession. Shortly after the deliberations began, Louisiana and Texas seceded. The absence of several state delegations including all of those from the lower South, seriously reduced the conference's potential for success.

Many of the delegates were enthusiastic when they convened their first

\textsuperscript{19}Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 3 February 1861; Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 4 February 1861. Tyler Papers. Library of Congress.

\textsuperscript{20}Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 3 February 1861; 4 February 1861. Tyler Papers. Library of Congress.
meeting at Willard’s Hotel. In all, there were 132 delegates from twenty-one states. Northern Democrats and Whig-Americans from the border states were the most eager to find ways of saving the union. But some delegates, like secessionist James Seddon of Virginia and Radical Republican Salmon P. Chase of Ohio, had no intention of compromising. Most genuinely wanted to find ways of preserving the union. According to David Potter, they took their cues from the fathers of the American Constitution by placing a distinguished Virginian in the chair and closing their sessions to the public and the press. Unfortunately, John Tyler lacked George Washington’s persuasive abilities and influence, and the delegates lacked any new ideas. Potter writes that it was an old men’s convention and most participants were as old and infirm as John Tyler. Commenting on the age and health of the delegates, James McPherson has noted that they belonged to a bygone era. But the older men proved they still had as much capacity for acrimonious debates as their younger counterparts in Congress.²¹

The work of the peace conference took three weeks and culminated with the proposal of a seven-part amendment to the constitution that hardly differed from an earlier attempt at compromise proposed by Senator John J. Crittenden of Kentucky. Chiefly, the delegates proposed an extension of the Missouri Compromise line to protect both southern slavery and northern free soil. Under the provisions of the proposed amendment, southerners would be able to take

their slaves to any territory south of the 36° 30' line. Although Tyler publicly supported the recommendation of the conference, privately he had concluded that Virginia should secede. He discussed his position with Julia, and she reported their views to her mother:

People are catching at straws as a relief to their pressing anxieties and look to the Peace Commission as if they possessed some decisive power to restore order and harmony. Here you can realize more than anywhere else the distracted state of the Country. In the Peace Conference a Committee [sic] are engaged (one from each state) in the preparation of a plan for adjustment and when they report, which will be on Friday, the end I suppose can be foreseen. The New York & Massachusetts delegation will no doubt perform all the mischief they can and it may be, will defeat this patriotic effort at pacification. But whether it succeeds or not Virginia will have sustained her separation and will retire with dignity from the field to join without loss of time her more Southern sisters; the rest of the slave Border states will follow her lead.22

Tyler actually favored the minority report offered by Virginia secessionist James A. Seddon which proposed a constitutional amendment to permit the South a veto over executive appointments south of the 36° 30' line. The conference was a disappointment for both Tylers because the delegates accomplished nothing more than a modification of Crittenden’s Compromise.23

During her three weeks in Washington, Julia engaged other southerners in discussions about the sectional crisis, but the conversations usually focused on her husband. She particularly enjoyed meeting with Elizabeth and John J. Crittenden, who had placed much of their hope in John Tyler. Governor Charles Morehead of Kentucky assured Julia that her husband would achieve immortality if he "could


23Seager, 456-457.
bring all the discordant elements together." As Tyler struggled to keep order among the contentious delegates at the peace convention, the United States Senate began to come apart. Virginia Tunstall Clay of Alabama gave Julia a sobering account of Louisiana Senator Judah P. Benjamin's final speech on the floor of the Senate:

[Mrs. Clay] says Mr. Benjamin's speech was perfectly thrilling—full of feeling & eloquence while she was drowned in tears over his soul shining words. Some black Republican Ladies! behind her yawned & said, "how tiresome he is, the disgusting traitor!" besides a great deal more of such impudence.24

Of one thing Julia was certain, women were just as intolerant of opposing political views as their husbands.

By the third week of the peace convention, Julia was no longer interested in focusing exclusively on John Tyler's health and the deliberations of the convention. The atmosphere in Washington was gloomy, and she was never one to wallow in misery. Nothing lifted her spirits like a gay social life, and there was no better place to have fun than in the nation's capital even in the midst of the disunion crisis. According to Julia, after receiving "an incessant stream of company at the Brown Hotel, she soon began making calls herself. By the time she accompanied her husband to a party hosted by Senator Stephen Douglas, Julia was fully enjoying herself. At the Douglas party, she was the center of attention. She saw old friends whom she had not seen in years and flattered herself by noting several prominent guests who went out of their way to make her

acquaintance. According to Julia, George Bancroft, the noted historian and politician, greeted her and attempted to claim kinship through a relative who had married a Miss Gardiner of Gardiner's Island. The most handsome man there in appearance and manners was Governor Charles Morehead of Kentucky, and he reminded Julia of her father. "People turned up & recalled themselves to me that I certainly never expected to have met again." Always happy to be the center of attention, Julia understood full well that John Tyler's fame helped fulfill her own ambitions.

Although Julia could have spent every moment of her day discussing politics or listening to political debates and every evening at a social event, she never forgot her domestic responsibilities. As gratifying as she had found the visit to Washington, Julia worried about her children for a good portion of the three weeks. The youngest child Pearl, who was only eight months old in February 1861, was suffering the ill effects of teething and a cold when they arrived home. Immediately, Julia concluded that she needed to remain at Sherwood Forest with her children for several days before going any place else. John Tyler, on the other hand, planned to go to Richmond to attend the Virginia State Convention, and Julia reluctantly decided to join him after spending a few days with the children. As her husband projected himself into the impending crisis, Julia became increasingly aware that her domestic responsibilities pulled her in two different directions. She continued to worry about Tyler's health and believed that he needed her at his side, but their seven children also needed parental attention. Julia's decisions were not easy. She had to plan ways to divide her time between
her politically active husband and her children.  

She did nothing to dissuade John Tyler from participating in the Virginia State Convention. Although many years younger and in good health, Julia complained that the Washington peace conference had left her physically exhausted. Tyler must have been exhausted as well, but he went on to Richmond anyway. Since Julia had decided to follow several days later, she would not be on hand to administer his medication or to watch over him. She may have breathed a little easier knowing that fourteen year old Gardie would be with his father. After a few days in Richmond, John Tyler took him to Miss Pegram’s school to visit Julie without knowing that the school girls had been exposed to measles. When Gardie caught measles from his sister, Tyler took him back to Sherwood Forest where he passed measles on to the other five Tyler children. Julia had her hands full but boasted about the nursing care she provided. She started Gardie on “blue pills” and castor oil which relieved the fever and “[kept] his bowels open afterward.” She also administered warm lemonade and flax tea with lemon. Julia contracted a severe cold herself while nursing the children, and as if she did not have enough to do, Tazewell arrived with his wife and baby for a visit. Somehow she managed to find enough energy to nurse the ill and entertain as well.  

While Julia nursed sick children back to health, her husband was busy moving Virginians toward secession. Although Tyler had previously shared

\[\text{25Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 19 February 1861. Tyler Papers. Library of Congress.}\]

\[\text{26Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 28 March 1861; Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 11 April 1861. Tyler Papers. Library of Congress.}\]
childcare with his Julia, he was now more caught up in public affairs than domestic concerns. One characteristic that he had shared with Julia was his love for the union, and ironically, that had been his primary reason for returning to politics. In a speech to the Virginia State Convention, he asked delegates:

Where is that Union . . . which we once so much loved? Where its beautiful flag, which waved over a land of wealth, of grandeur, and of beauty? Wrong, abuse, contumely, unconstitutional acts, looking to a higher law than the Constitution, thus setting men free from their obligations to society, have cut the ship of state loose from her moorings; and here she is drifting without helm or compass amid rocks and whirlpools, her fragments floating in every direction—one part has gone South, while other parts, moored for this moment, will probably at the next break loose from their insecure anchorage. I grieve over this state of things by day and by night. When I think of the manner in which all this has been brought about by a race of hungry, artful Catalines, who have misled the Northern mind solely for their own aggrandizement, my blood becomes so heated in my veins as to scald and burn them in its rapid flow.  

But John Tyler, like most southern defenders of states’ rights, was just as intransigent as the northern politicians he criticized. His conviction that southerners had the right to take slave property into the territories was stronger than his love for the Union. Tyler and other Virginia secessionists lacked vision and were unable to see beyond their own traditions and institutions. Instead of providing vital leadership for the rest of the southern states, they decided to follow the lead of South Carolina’s fire-eaters.

By the end of April 1861 Julia had become somewhat concerned about the safety of both family and property. After the battle at Fort Sumter, political passions seemed to erupt everywhere. New York City, once a bastion of southern

---

27John Tyler’s Speech to the Virginia State Convention, 13 March 1861, quoted in Lyon G. Tyler, Letters and Times of the Tylers, Volume II (Richmond, Va: Whittet & Shepperson, 1884-96), 625.
sympathy, became the scene of angry pro-Union demonstrations that caused Julia to worry about the safety of her mother's home in Staten Island. She was afraid that the mob in the streets of New York posed a serious threat to her mother. For the first time, Julia also worried about the contents of her letters to New York and noted, "I would like to write . . . freely, but I suppose it would not be prudent. I do not wish to write anything that would [result in] a delay of my letter." There was good reason for her to fear censorship of her letters; the Virginia return address and the name Tyler were becoming synonymous with secession. Aside from John Tyler's public support of secession in Virginia, his son Robert made pro-South speeches in Philadelphia, where he had settled. Angry citizens reacted violently to the secessionist in their midst, and he had to slip out of Philadelphia in order to escape bodily harm. While Robert and Priscilla sought refuge in Richmond, their nineteen year old daughter hoisted the rebel flag to the top of the Confederate Capitol in ceremonies held on March 5, 1861. When John Tyler pushed Virginians to secede in his fiery speech to the state convention, he led his family out of the Union with flare.28

But secession created a dilemma for Julia that she was unable to admit to either her husband or her mother. She identified with her husband's decision to become a southern secessionist but could not completely sever her relationship with the North. Intellectually, Julia accepted the arguments of secessionists but

was uncomfortable with disunion. Aside from many fond memories of youthful years spent in New York, she was ever mindful of family members and friends who continued to live there. Emotionally, Julia was not ready for secession, but as the wife of a Virginia planter, she had no other choice. She was both a southerner by choice and a dutiful wife. The circumstances of Julia's life compelled her to secede along with the other Tylers.

In addition to separation from northern family and friends, Julia quickly discovered that secession meant additional sacrifices. The coming of war signaled economic difficulties and the need for southern families to reduce their spending. Since the financial situation at Sherwood Forest had always been difficult, John Tyler expected things to get much worse. From Richmond he wrote, "Do dearest live as frugally as possible in the household—trying times are before us." After years of extravagance, Julia was not happy with this unusual advice from her husband, but she did her best to live as the circumstances required. George Rable has noted that many slaveholding women responded to the economic constraints of the war with a spirit of patriotism and self-sacrifice and that "a new asceticism pervaded many gentry" homes. This was certainly the situation at Sherwood Forest because Julia was too enthusiastic about the southern cause to respond in any other manner. She did what was necessary for her family's survival during the war years.29

One of the most difficult problems for women was the protection of real

29 John Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 17 April 1861. Tyler Family Papers. Virginia Historical Society; Rable, 83, 91.
and personal property. In April 1861 Julia reported that two female acquaintances had fled their home in Old Point Comfort after the landing of a regiment of Massachusetts troops at Fort Monroe. Whether the women left their home because of fear or because of revulsion for the northern troops, whom they described as "the scum of the earth," is not clear. Julia considered the presence of the troops as an invasion of the South and worried about her own real estate in Old Point Comfort. With money from the sale of land inherited from Alexander, she had purchased a vacation house there in her own right. Named Villa Margaret after her late sister, the property was a constant source of worry and anguish throughout the war. Julia's more immediate concern was that she would not be able to take the children to Old Point Comfort for the summer. In June of 1861 there were reports about the capture of a Confederate flag described as "a dirty affair & sewed with dirty fingers" from Tyler's villa. The reports were untrue. There was no Confederate flag at Julia's summer home.30

Although news editors had no way of knowing that Villa Margaret was actually Julia's property, they correctly assumed that the property would have been an appropriate site for a rebel flag. Julia fully committed herself to her husband's views and gave evidence that she supported secession as strongly as he did. While the Virginia State Convention unanimously elected John Tyler to the Provisional Congress of the Confederate States of American, Julia indignantly denounced her brother David's sympathy with the Union cause:

---

30Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 10 June 1861. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University Library.
I think D[avid] . . . belongs to a different school of politics from his experienced friend, the President, and is ready to deny State-sovereignty. Therefore he opposes the movement of the South to save itself from destruction through an abolition attack, and sympathizes with the dominant power of the North. I was so unprepared for his views that I read his letter aloud to the President without first perusing it, which, if I had done, I should not have committed so decided [a] mistake. He says the government at Washington will not invade, but will only reclaim its property, and take by force the forts now in possession of southern States. What is that but invasion, I should like to know? The government at Washington has no business with the forts that were built for the protection of the States that have seceded . . . The Northern people are very easily duped if they do not see their President means to invade the South . . . For my part, I am utterly ashamed of the State in which I was born, and its people. All soul and magnanimity have departed from them—"patriotism" indeed! A community sold to the vilest politicians.31

The coming of the war signaled a serious rift in the Gardiner family that would only increase during the next three years. Juliana, who sympathized with Julia and the South, spent most of the war years worrying about her daughter’s safety. Since political and military tensions limited travel and other forms of communications, there was little either woman could do to comfort the other.

Disruption of the mail between the North and the South was one of the most irritating facets of the war for women. As early as April 1861, Julia complained that her mother’s letters did not reach Virginia as quickly as before. Often she wrote several letters before she received a reply. Both women were anxious about danger as the country inched toward civil war, and letters were the only way they had to reassure one another. Often the postal service was so poor that Julia concluded that the flow of mail had stopped. At the end of April John Tyler carried one of Julia’s letter’s to Richmond to find a private means of

---


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
transporting it to New York. Later she sent letters across Union lines by acquaintances who were traveling to the North, but sometimes there was no way to get a letter to New York. Occasionally Julia sent a letter with someone traveling to Baltimore in the hope that mail service from that Maryland city worked better. By the end of May 1861, she worried because there was a new "Southern Postal Arrangement" that she feared the Washington government would not honor. Without an agreement honored by both sides, mail service would end.32

Throughout most of the summer of 1861 Julia complained about postal delays, but by August, she allowed herself to forget the problem long enough to ask her mother to send "a nice pair of long & short lace mits." By December of 1861, Julia thought she had found a solution to the mail dilemma, when she reported that a letter sent between Union General John E. Wool and Confederate General Benjamin Huger would reach her mother "as expeditiously as yours came to me." But mail service between Sherwood Forest and Staten Island was just as much of a problem during the spring of 1862 as it had been a year earlier.33

On April 28, 1862, Julia sent a letter "by private hand to Leesburg, County of Loudoun, now under the government of the U. S. being occupied by its troops.

32Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 28 May 1861; 26 August 1861; Tyler Papers. Library of Congress.

33The Confederacy established its own Post Office Department in February, 1861 from the existing postal system created by the federal government. Until June 1, 1861, the Confederate Post Office continued to operate under the direction of the United States Post Office. Usually, private express companies handled mail deliveries from the Confederacy to the United States.
From there there is daily mail to Baltimore, and thus my letter will perchance reach you." In an 1862 letter, Juliana summarized the women's frustrations about the mail:

I received your letter dated 28th of April sent by the way of Leesburg. Is this dreadful war to have no end? Would that the good & wise could settle it without another battle. I have written you numerous letters sent by Fortress Monroe & thro' a gentleman who had a friend going direct[ly] to Virginia, but I doubt if he accomplished it as I have heard no communication.

As long as Julia and her mother were apart during the Civil War years, the flow of mail was a problem.34

During the early spring of 1861, Juliana Gardiner became so frightened about the safety of her daughter and grandchildren that she wrote directly to John Tyler, who was in Richmond attending a meeting of the state convention. She wanted him to send Julia and the children to New York where they would be safer. Refusing to permit his family to go, Tyler attempted to reassure her by saying that the entire "State is clad in steel, [and] under the command of the most accomplished leaders." He reported that all members of the family were well, and added "if I find our situation dangerous on the river, we will go to the mountains, or other retreats in Virginia." His words did little to comfort her. By June Juliana was even more fearful that Julia and her family were in harm's way. From "conjecture & contradictory acounts" in New York newspapers which reported a

---

force of 25,000 to 30,000 troops at Old Point (some housed in Villa Margaret), Juliana anticipated a "terrible battle in Virginia." The only thing that kept her from panicking was a report in "the Herald which seems to breathe a word of encouragement that the P's home will be unmolested." Nonetheless, she told Julia how much better she would feel if the whole family were in New York, where they could all "be together at this trying moment, but I am sure the P. will act wisely & I trust his sound judgment." As much as Juliana wanted Julia and her family to come to Staten Island, she knew that neither her daughter nor John Tyler would abandon the South. Both were far too committed to the cause of secession to leave.35

Julia tried very hard to reassure her mother that she was completely safe in eastern Virginia. She placed a lot of her faith in the valor of southern men and was particularly impressed with the military skills of "Col. [Robert. E] Lee, a splendid man every inch of him . . . He can only lead to victory if the shocking war continues." During the spring of 1861, no southerner was more confident of the South's military readiness than Julia. Yet she feared that the North would not fight "civilized warfare with the South but the most savage suggestions are held out to . . . the appetites of the brutes who will in legions I judge compile its army." Whatever the situation, she told Juliana, "One thing is certain. I shall not leave the Pres't. He might be taken ill & I could not reach him." Instead Julia advised her mother, "Do not concern yourself in the slightest degree about me & mine [;]

35Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 10 June 1861. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University Library.
only preserve your health, which is a matter of double importance to me now. I miss a few luxuries and your letters, but we are all in unusual[ly] good health."\(^{36}\)

During mid-summer of 1861, the war came to Virginia when Union and Confederate forces clashed Bull Run Creek at Manassas. Thrilled by the results of the First Battle of Manassas, Julia informed her mother that she had sent old wine and large quantities of blackberry cordial to Confederate Generals Pierre Gustave T. Beauregard, Joseph E. Johnston, and Milledge Luke Bonham, all of whom took the time to acknowledge her gifts. This gesture linked Julia to other southern women who wanted to show their appreciation for gallant and courageous Confederate officers. She was also anxious to do all that she could to aid enlisted men, and her immediate plan was to "throw open our doors for the reception of wounded & convalescent soldiers, six or eight at a time." Public volunteerism during the Civil War was a new experience for southern women like Julia, although their grandmothers had provided whatever aid they could during the American Revolution.\(^{37}\)

Proud of her neighbors, all of whom were ready to do whatever they could to aid the southern cause, Julia boasted that northern people could not begin to dream "of what stuff they are made." Always prone to give the southern gentry more than enough credit for patriotism, she noted that all were ready to take their


positions in the military both as officers and regular soldiers. Julia also noticed some of the same patriotism in Gardie and Alex who were unhappy that they were still too young to enlist. She reported, however, that "they are fired up with enthusiasm for what they consider such a sacred cause as the defense of their soil from the wicked and cruel invader." The boys could hardly have had any other opinion after growing up listening to the endless political discussions of their parents. For the time being, Julia did not need more than one member of her family actively in Confederate service.38

No officer or soldier had greater commitment to the Confederacy than John Tyler, after working zealously to lead Virginia out of the Union, he lacked the health and energy required for military service. During the first week of January 1862 Tyler felt well as he prepared to go the meeting of the Confederate Congress in Richmond, and Julia believed his health was better than usual. She did not see any reason for concern, but John Tyler fell ill and died on January 17. Although she sent her mother a detailed account of her husband’s death on January 20, Julia recalled the circumstances with much greater embellishment about twenty years later. According to the latter account, she planned to join Tyler at the Exchange Hotel in Richmond one week after he had arrived there. In the meantime, Julia hoped to visit friends at both Brandon and Shirley plantations, but after experiencing a dream in which John Tyler lay gravely ill, she changed her plans and departed for Richmond immediately. Accompanied by a slave nurse

and nineteen-month old Pearl, Julia went directly to the Exchange Hotel upon her arrival in the city and was pleased to find her husband in good health. Relieved by his appearance, she told him of her dream and the terrible fear that she had experienced. Within two days, he awoke with a chill and collapsed in the hotel dining room after going downstairs to have hot tea. When he regained consciousness, Tyler agreed to follow the advice of a physician and return home to rest and recover. He planned to leave for Sherwood Forest with Julia on January 18 but died a day earlier. According to Julia, the bed in her dream was exactly like the bed upon which he died, probably of cerebral vascular thrombosis.39

In spite of the uncertainty of wartime mail delivery, Julia managed to route a letter to her mother which succinctly described Tyler’s death:

This is to confirm the intelligence you may have received through the newspapers of the death of my precious Husband. He died in Richmond on the 17th inst. after a few days [of] illness. We had no idea he was dangerously ill until a few minutes before his decease—so bright did his intellect shine to the last—a merciful God spared him the knowledge that his hour had come until the last moments arrived, and it seems to me that as a reward for his great virtues his transcript was as speedy as he had desired. I and my children are indeed bereft—a truer man, a tenderer husband, a more devoted Father, never existed, and surely a light of Intellect has gone out in the world, such as is rarely equalled.40

Many southerners joined Julia in their praise of John Tyler. They remembered him as a statesman and a patriot, but northerners were not as generous in their comments. Even during her time of mourning, Julia was extremely sensitive to negative press assessments of her husband. A magnificent tribute from Governor

39"Reminiscences of Julia Gardiner Tyler" in *Letters and Times of the Tylers*; Seager, 470.


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
John Letcher of Virginia and a touching eulogy delivered by Anglican Bishop John Johns did not completely overshadow an article in the New York Herald which characterized Tyler as unhonored. As usual, Julia questioned the motives of the offending editors.41

Nothing would have comforted Julia any more than having her mother at her side, but she advised Juliana to remain in New York. Although fully confident that military officers on both sides of the conflict would permit her passage, Julia worried about Juliana's age and health. Concluding that a trip in late January would unnecessarily result in "exposures incident to the season and changed modes of travel would risk without a doubt your health," she tried to convince her mother that a journey to Virginia was unwise. Julia knew that Juliana would probably reject her advice, but her concerns were sincere. Undaunted by her daughter's admonitions Juliana tried to reach Sherwood Forest anyhow, but Union officials were not as sympathetic as Julia expected. They refused to issue a pass.42

Not since her sister Margaret's death had Julia experienced such anguish, but she had very little time to focus on her grief. Aside from the problem of survival in a war-torn nation, Julia had seven children to rear, myriad debts, a large plantation, and about seventy slaves. After always living a pampered life, she was now alone and without the support of the two people who had always


sought to make her life easier—her husband and her mother. During her bereavement Julia had no relatives to lend support, except her stepson Robert and his wife Priscilla Cooper Tyler. As Robert Seager correctly writes, Julia would survive by drawing on her abundant inner strength. At age forty-one she had had neither opportunity nor occasion to be self-reliant. Yet Julia was no different from the countless other southern women who were left to their own resources as a result of the war. Like other slaveholding women, she demonstrated the ability to carry on after the death of her husband.

43 Seager, 470471.
Chapter VIII
A Retreat From War

Within four months after John Tyler’s death, the Civil War reached eastern
Virginia and threatened the safety of Julia and her children. Like other southern
women, she grimly anticipated the arrival of northern troops and took whatever
precautions she could to protect her family. Given the location of Sherwood
Forest, however, she could not do much to keep her family or property out of
harm’s way. Situated northwest of Yorktown, the Tyler plantation was along the
strategic route from the Chesapeake Bay to the Confederate capital in Richmond.
During the first week of April 1862, General George McClellan landed about
55,000 troops near the site of the Revolutionary War battlefield at Yorktown, and
Julia expected she would soon hear the "roar of battle" on the peninsula. Only a
quick and decisive Confederate victory would keep the family safe, but Julia knew
better than to hope for miracles.1

The war complicated Julia’s adjustment to John Tyler’s death. Invasion of
eastern Virginia by northern troops forced her to shift focus from southern politics
to personal and family safety. At age forty-two, Julia was suddenly independent
and realized that she alone had responsibility for seven dependent children and a
plantation with seventy slaves. Although John Tyler and Juliana Gardiner had
done everything in their power to prevent Julia from worrying about plantation

1Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 28 April 1862. Tyler Family
Papers. College of William & Mary; McPherson, 426.
debts, she now inherited them. Under the best of circumstances, adjustment would have been difficult, but an invading army in the neighborhood evoked so much fear that she could think of nothing more important than trying to survive. More than anything, Julia wanted protection and security from financial ruin, and she could not expect to find either in Virginia in 1862.

At first she did not seem very different from other southern women as she braced herself for the horrors of war. George Rable notes that a peculiar serenity came over southern women as the enemy approached. As they stood in the path of danger many denounced northern soldiers as the most hateful of enemies without acknowledging any southern blame for the war. Julia had expressed contempt for northern politicians for so long that criticism of the Union army seemed natural, and she solemnly prepared to withstand whatever fate the enemy planned for her. One thing she declared with certainty, "I do not intend to desert my home, whichever army carries the day." The best thing she could do for her family was appear brave, no matter how frightening her situation. She explained her predicament to Juliana:

If I am molested by brutal men it will be more than I expect in this civilized age, though it would seem as if we had relapsed into barbarism, from the quantity of kindred blood that has already flowed upon the battlefield. I cannot flee and leave all my servants who would consider it a cruel act to desert them. If I leave they wish me to take them along, but how would it be possible to remove so many women & children? No, I have concluded to remain where I am and brave the worst, and as you know my timidity you can judge I do not anticipate much inconvenience.

As usual Juliana had been pressuring her daughter to flee to the safety of New

---

2Rable, 156-57.
York, but Julia had not yet decided to leave Sherwood Forest. Instead she attempted to reassure Juliana by telling her that she did not expect trouble. Additionally, Julia and her children had just recovered from a serious bout of influenza, and all were too weak to leave. As McClellan's army inched closer and closer to Sherwood Forest, no one understood better than Julia how frightening war is for non-combatants. Ironically, Juliana hoped that her status in the North would insure Julia of special protection not available to other southern women.3

Juliana turned to Cornelia Van Ness Roosevelt for help. She was the wife of a New York Congressman and a personal friend of General James Wool who was on the Virginia peninsula with General McClellan. Juliana urged her to do whatever she could to aid Julia. Mrs. Roosevelt implored General Wool to give the family all of the protection at his disposal, and she assured Juliana that he would use his own considerable power to that end. Even as a network of New York friends worked to provide protection for the Tyler family, Julia began to doubt the wisdom of remaining at Sherwood Forest. At first she wanted to flee to Europe, "away from this scene of strife where we can only be lookers on, merely for the sake of educating the children."4 Financial realities prevented her from thinking about Europe too long. Increasingly, she began to consider taking her children to the safety of the Gardiner home in Staten Island. The decision

---


4Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, Sherwood Forest, 1 April 1862. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
resulted from both fear and common sense. There was no reason to believe that family connections could protect her from being caught between opposing armies. The best she could hope to receive from well-connected friends was help in obtaining federal permission for the family to travel to the North.\textsuperscript{5}

Although Julia was unable to remove her children from Charles City County before Union forces arrived, no physical harm came to the family. Based on a 1934 interview with Lyon Gardiner Tyler, Oliver Perry Chitwood and others have reported that McClellan posted a protective guard around the plantation that saved Sherwood Forest from the ravages of war.\textsuperscript{6} This story resulted from Juliana's report that Cornelia Roosevelt requested protection for the family, but there is no evidence that she succeeded. The \textit{Official Records} of the Union Army make no reference to support the presence of guards around Sherwood Forest. More important, Gardie's recollections of the 1862 Peninsula Campaign suggest that the family was unprotected during this period:

McClellan's Army had closed around the north of Richmond and our home was within the enemy lines. In May we had our first experience of actual war. A detachment of Stuart's light artillery one day came dashing through our farm, took positions on the bluffs overlooking the River . . . and fired several rounds at some Yankee transports passing up the river. My brother Alexander and myself, wild with excitement, rushed to the stable, saddled our . . . ponies . . . and arming ourselves with a revolver a piece, went at full speed to the scene of the conflict! But before reaching the river we met the batter returning, having affected the object of their reconnaissance. A gunboat had steamed up to the support of the transports, and several shells from it buried themselves in the field not far below the house. After

\textsuperscript{5}Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 18 May 1862. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University Library.

this there was not a day without its incidents. Scouting parties of the enemy began to make their appearance, shortly to be followed by hordes of our calvary. We could distinctly hear the roar of the cannon around Richmond. In July McClellan’s Army began its retreat, passing our home by the two roads running on either side of the farm. For three days and nights there seemed to be a continuous stream of wagons, artillery, infantry and calvary rolling by our front and back gates.  

Gardie’s testimony suggests that family members may have been in grave danger during the Peninsula Campaign. At the very least, Julia knew that friends in New York had failed to prevent the war from reaching Sherwood Forest, and there were no guarantees about future safety. She did not like living in a war zone, and her mother continued to remind her that she did not have to remain in Virginia. Julia understood the danger and had already experienced tremendous fear as armies rode across her property. As George Rable has noted, many women adjusted to the fear generated by guns firing around them, but others did not. 

Leaving Sherwood Forest was not easy. Julia wanted to put all of her affairs in order first and was unwilling to abandon her property to Yankee looters. She also had children to support, and the plantation was her only possible source of income. Before leaving the South, therefore, Julia hoped to sell the plantation. In the summer of 1862, she decided to send some of her children to New York while she settled her affairs. Gardie was already a teenager, and he refused to leave the South as a matter of principle. Of the six remaining children,

---

7Memorandum of David Gardiner Tyler on his experiences during the Civil War, [n.d.]. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

8Rable, 168.

9Coleman, 143.
Julia decided to take the oldest four to her mother. They would be more than a handful for Juliana, who was also legal guardian of Margaret's son, Harry Beeckman.

When Julia was finally ready to take her children to New York, she turned for assistance to her old New York friend General John Adams Dix, who served as Commander of the Department of Virginia and head of Union forces at Fort Monroe. With the aid of his staff, she obtained a pass which permitted her and her six family members to board a flag-of-truce boat headed for Hampton. From Hampton they sailed to Baltimore where they made connections for Staten Island. Gardie remained at Sherwood Forest, along with a cousin named Maria Tyler, to look after the plantation. Dix's staff went out of their way to make the trip as pleasant as possible for Julia and the children.

Since living conditions at her mother's house were uncomfortable, Julia's brief stay in New York was not pleasant. Castleton Hill was a spacious residence, but there were already too many people living there. Aside from Juliana, there were ten permanent residents. Harry Beeckman lived there as well as Julia's brother David, his wife, and their two infant children, and five servants. Four Tyler children brought the population to fifteen and the sound level to an all time high. Julia wanted no part of so chaotic a household and told her brother that he needed to find new quarters before she returned with her two small children. He

---

10 Seager, 477.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
refused.\textsuperscript{11} She failed to understand that only Juliana had the authority to ask
David to leave, and Juliana was more willing to tolerate the noise and the
crowding than to do anything to alienate either of her children. The decision to
leave them in New York was painful enough to convince Julia that the "duties [of]
a soldier" were no "more arduous & engrossing than [her's] as head of a family."
At least for now, Alex, Julie, Lonnie, and Lachlan were in a more stable
environment than the one to which Julia and the two youngest children
returned.\textsuperscript{12}

She reached Old Point Comfort on January 8, 1863, and was happy to find
that General Dix's staff stood ready to arrange passage for her and her two
children on a flag-of-truce boat that would deliver them to their own landing on
the James River. Another boat that had come from Washington was already
waiting at Old Point, but its deck was crowded with women and children "huddled
together like so many animals." When Julia noticed that many were ill, she
thought "it quite providential" that she "had a friend raised up to me in the person
of Capt. [Wilson] Barstow" who had made arrangements for her passage on
another boat.\textsuperscript{13} Her relationship with Union officers was odd. Although Julia
regarded the Union Army as the enemy, she acknowledged individual officers as


\textsuperscript{12}Julia Gardiner Tyler to James A. Semple, 28 April 1863. Tyler Papers. Library of Congress.

\textsuperscript{13}Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana Gardiner, Old Point Comfort, 8 January 1863. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
friends and gratefully received aid that would not have been extended to other southern women. Not only did Julia accept favors from men like John Dix and Wilson Barstow, she expected them.

Julia and the children arrived at Sherwood Forest eight days after President Lincoln's January 1, 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, but it did not affect the status of her slaves because Charles City County was under Union occupation. Conditions had not changed at Sherwood Forest during her absence, and the slaves seemed glad to see Julia. Along with Gardie, Maria, and the Tyler's neighbors, they gathered along the river's edge to greet her. She noted that all of "the Negroes are well disposed & in order." Julia and her neighbors continued to hope that would never change. Southern independence and the preservation of southern institutions were still important priorities in spite of Yankee occupation.14

Four months later she was less optimistic about her future as a slaveholder. Julia needed field hands to produce her wheat and corn crops, but safety was a primary concern. She resolved to "keep the slaves . . . as long as I am out of danger, but the moment I have any doubts on the subject arrangements [will be] made for another disposition of them at a moment's notice." She already had doubts but had no alternate ideas. January 1863 was not a time for selling slaves to the lower South, and manumission would have been too much like a reward for recalcitrant behavior. More important, she could not afford to get rid of her

---

slaves. Admitting that free labor was nearly impossible to find, she reported that "there are no working free people around, either black or white; and at Rich'd. the wages of the common whites are so high they would not come into the country for any consideration a farmer would be willing to give."\textsuperscript{15} She confessed to feeling particularly insecure around the younger slaves, but economic circumstances prevented her from getting rid of them. Julia's expression of uneasiness echoed the complaints of other plantation mistresses. During the war slaveholding women often felt hesitant and uncertain as they made decisions about their plantations, but they knew they could not afford "to be immobilized by doubt."\textsuperscript{16}

Julia considered herself fortunate when John C. Tyler, an elderly nephew of her husband, came to live at Sherwood Forest and supervise the farming. She noted that he "will relieve me of many embarrassments and enable me to devote more time to my correspondence."\textsuperscript{17} Unwilling to rely too heavily on Gardie's untested skills as a planter, she also managed to find two white men who were available for employment. One already lived as tenant the plantation and desperately needed work. Identified only as Mr. Harrod, he took charge of Julia's mill and accepted a salary of "$150 a year & his board." The second man, a Mr.

\textsuperscript{15}Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 8 April 1863, Sherwood Forest. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.  
\textsuperscript{16}Rable, 113.  
\textsuperscript{17}Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 8 April 1863. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary; Julia Gardiner Tyler to James A. Semple, 28 April 1863. Tyler Papers. Library of Congress; Rable, 113.
Oakley, had been the overseer at nearby Weyanoke Plantation and was now an old man. He also accepted employment at Sherwood Forest for one year at a salary of $12 per month. The salaries were extremely low, but there was no hope of earning more in Charles City County in 1863. Julia was lucky to obtain their help. She reasoned that these men would work hard enough, "so that when I choose to take away the young men & women [slaves] the place can still be conducted in part with what I have left." 

In spite of uncertainty about the labor force, Julia had the field hands plant oats and corn during the spring of 1863, and Gardie supervised the planting of a "meagre crop of wheat." Unfortunately, she understood very little about operating a plantation and was overly optimistic about profits for the year. "The immense prices . . . will enable us to bring something out of nothing. I did well by the wheat I found here. The immense prices we get for everything are a great encouragement, and I shall be able to pay all debts of the estate without touching the principal." She did not understand that the wartime inflation would eliminate her profits. Julia continued using Confederate money as late as 1864 without commenting on its devaluation. She did report the high prices to her mother. "Shoes & boots are $40 & $50 per pair, suits of clothes $150 for almost

18 More than likely, Julia paid them in Confederate currency. There is no evidence that suggests that she paid in specie or United States currency.


20Ibid.

21Seager, 487.
any kind, calico & cotton goods $2.50 per yd. Homespun will soon be entirely worn by at least the country people. I am spinning altogether for the servants.  

As eastern Virginia began to experience the burden of wartime inflation, some of her neighbors were able to sell their estates. She reported the prices without indicating whether the costs were in Confederate dollars or United States currency. Dr. James Selden sold his plantation Kittewan for $30,000, paid his debts, and made plans to leave the James River area. When Berkeley, another neighboring plantation, "sold for $50,000 in its present horrible state," Julia told her mother, "You may depend upon it; I shall not hold back Sherwood if I consider it best not to do so." She needed to sell her plantation before returning to New York and found encouragement in these other real estate sales. But selling Sherwood Forest proved impossible. There were too many liens against it, and there were no potential buyers.

In 1863 she did sell some of the contents of the house in order to pay bills. The wine supply brought about $4,000 in Confederate currency; two horses went for $800 while four pieces of silver commanded $600. She knew she had no adequate way of safeguarding any of her Virginia possessions while in New York. Furniture and other property left behind would be at the mercy of invading armies and looting slaves. As a precaution, she sent many remaining valuables, including...

---

22Julia Gardiner Tyler to Juliana McLachlan Gardiner, 8 April 1863. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

the plantation's 12,000 volume library, to Richmond for storage. Unfortunately, everything that she left in Virginia was "either taken or destroyed by being broken up" or "burned in the great fire of Richmond."24 Given the courteous treatment she had received from Union forces, Julia might have been able to protect her property if she had remained in residence at Sherwood Forest.

Aside from worries about Sherwood Forest, there were too many people who depended on Julia. Gardie's safety was one of her primary concerns, and there was no way of protecting him. Julia was not one of those southern women "whose only regret was not having more sons to give for her country". She was not at all anxious to see Gardie enter military service. Juliana pressed her to send him to Europe or to bring him to the North to prevent him from being drafted, but Julia could not do that. At seventeen years old he had a say in decisions about his own future, and leaving the South was not an option. Instead of joining the army, he agreed to attend Washington College in Lexington. Before John Tyler's death, he and Julia had considered that town as a safe spot to which they could flee if it became too dangerous in the Virginia Tidewater.25

Aside from Gardie, Julia also had a responsibility to Maria Tyler who was both her niece and her companion. Usually referred to as an orphan, Maria had lived at Sherwood Forest since 1860 and had become a permanent part of the

---

24Julia Gardiner Tyler's 1862 Estate Inventory taken at the time of John Tyler's death and attached explanation which she probably wrote many years later. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

25Juliana McLachlan Gardiner to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 19 August 1863. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary; Rable, 50; Seager, 478-79.
family circle. According to Julia, Maria had "no beauty" and "could not win a beau to suit even if she tried, and that she would be certain not to do." But beauty was not everything, and even Julia recognized her good qualities. She was intelligent and sang well to piano accompaniment. More important, Maria loved the Tyler children, and they, in turn, were devoted to her. But Julia did not make plans to take her to Staten Island. Juliana's house was already too crowded, and Maria was, after all, a southerner. Remaining at Sherwood Forest seems to have been the only option for her. Fortunately, since John C. Tyler would continue to live at the plantation, Maria would not be alone.26

Obtaining a legal pass to travel in the North was Julia's most difficult problem. The federal government now required southern visitors to first swear an oath of allegiance to the United States. No patriotic Confederate could bring him or herself to swear such an oath. Although Julia was not anxious to see her son join the army, she viewed the oath as an impossible barrier for a principled southern woman. Fully confident that her old friend General Dix would understand her problem, Julia took the matter directly to him. After requesting permission to board a flag-of-truce boat to travel from Fort Monroe to Staten Island, she professed a willingness to give her "parole d'honneur to be inoffensive in all respects to the United States government" but begged him to exempt her from the oath of allegiance. "I can imagine that an Oath of Allegiance should be required even of non-combating females of whom nothing is known, but is it not

security enough from me to give a simple assurance that I will not abuse the privilege allowed me of seeing & being with my family? General Dix did not reply to the request. He did not want to disobey a wartime directive. But Julia did not intend to take no for an answer.

While she waited for an opportunity to leave Virginia, draft riots erupted in New York City on July 13, 1863 and became a new source of worry for both Julia and Juliana. Anticipating her daughter's fears, Juliana attempted to reassure her by explaining the family's situation. "So far we are safe," but "there is an evident anxiety among all classes I have seen at the North." Characteristically, Juliana placed the blame at the feet of "the foreign population, Irish in particular." Within a week the violence had ended, but both women found cause for continued concern. As Julia impatiently awaited news from New York, she was uncertain about whether the children were any safer in the North than in Virginia. Actually, the only wealthy New Yorkers threatened by the rioters were those easily identified with the Republican Party, and there was no danger of Juliana being mistaken for a Republican. Nonetheless, the riot posed an indirect danger. Although brief in duration, it was a war within a war that left 82 people dead. Numerous other people suffered severe wounds including 178 soldiers and police


and 128 civilians.29

The unrest in New York only increased Julia’s determination to reach her mother’s house. Since four of her children were already there, Julia was anxious to see that they were actually safe. Unable to gain the necessary permission from Union officials, she turned to southern friends and connections for help. One of the people who provided assistance was James A. Semple, the husband of John Tyler’s daughter Letitia. Although his wife never accepted Julia as a member of the Tyler family, James did all he could to assist her. As an official with the Confederate Navy, he was able to supply Julia with information about blockade runners which would enable her to sail for Bermuda. From there she could arrange passage for New York. In mid-September James informed Julia that the Robert E. Lee would depart from Wilmington, North Carolina, sometimes during the first week of October, and he advised her to prepare to sail on that vessel.30

Before leaving the South, Julia needed to insure herself against the possible loss of her liquid assets. After paying her bills and debts, she had an undetermined amount of money left. Carrying Confederate currency to the North would have been foolish. The best alternative was to use the capital she had to purchase cotton that could be sold in Bermuda. Fortunately, James Semple understood Julia’s problem and stood ready to assist her. Unwilling to see her miss the opportunity of sailing in October, he volunteered to have the Ordnance

29 McKay, 209.

30 James A. Semple to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 23 September 1863. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University Library; Seager, 482.
Agent at Wilmington purchase the cotton and have it ready to go when she arrived. Confederate agents became fairly adept at providing this kind of assistance to influential southerners during 1863. General Josiah Gorgas, Confederate Chief of Ordnance, noted a "strong disposition to leave the Confederacy to go abroad." People wanted to escape danger, and Gorgas's men accommodated them as they had space. "Senator Gwynn and his daughter went in the last trip of the Lee. Mrs. Greeham went also lately, and now Mrs. ex-President Tyler applies for a passage on one of our boats. We are burdened with applications and I suppose the private steamers carry as many as can get on."

Since these vessels always departed from the port at Wilmington, North Carolina, Julia would be traveling a route which officials considered safe from Union seizure.

Julia's neighbors did not fault her for leaving the South. Although patriotic southerners, many of the families in Charles City County actually supported her decision. They knew that her motives were not political but resulted from family considerations. Close friends worried about her mode of travel, and at church one of them "prayed fervently for a Lady who was braving the perils of the sea." Julia was more fortunate than other women in her neighborhood. She had the option of gathering her family in a place that was safe—a place far away from the stress and the horrors of battlefields. Although members of her own family would later criticize her decision, people in

the neighborhood proved more tolerant. They simply regarded her action as a choice to be with her mother and not as a choice to live among the enemy. Besides Juliana Gardiner could hardly be characterized as the enemy. She was as critical of Union policies as any resident of Charles City County and would have been just as happy to have seen the South secede in peace.

Julia was unable to arrange her affairs in time to sail on the Robert E. Lee in early October but was ready to board another vessel by the end of the same month. She did not provide a description of her trip to North Carolina and probably thought better of writing her plans in a letter which might have been inspected. She traveled with her two children, Fitz and Pearlie, and a free black servant woman named Celia Johnson. Semple arranged for them to sail on the Cornubia, which primarily transported southern agricultural products to Nassau and Bermuda where Confederate purchasing agents traded these items for manufactured goods and munitions. The swift vessel was long, low, and narrow and supposedly could "slip in and out of Wilmington at pleasure, in spite of a cordon of Federal cruisers." On occasion the Cornubia had transported notables like Clement Vallandigham, but the vessel offered few amenities for a woman travelling with children.

Since only well-connected southerners gained passage on government-owned blockade runners, the crews of these boats tried to offer them every

\[\text{\footnotesize\[32\text{"Notes on the Ordnance Department of the Confederate Government," Southern Historical Society Papers, 12 (January-February 1884): 79-80.}
\]\[33\text{Gorgas, 58.}\]
possible courtesy. No one could have been more hospitable than the Cornubia's captain, Richard Haynsworth Gayle, who quickly befriended his passengers. A true gentleman in Julia's eyes, the thirty-one year old naval officer did everything in his power to make her comfortable during the voyage to Bermuda. The son of former Alabama Governor John Gayle and Sarah Ann Haynsworth Gayle and the brother-in-law of Colonel Josiah Gorgas, Captain Gayle was at ease around prominent people and was particularly well-suited for the task of providing hospitality to occasional distinguished travellers who boarded his vessel.

During their short voyage from Wilmington to Bermuda, Julia and Richard Gayle forged a strong friendship which benefited both of them during the remainder of the war years. There is no evidence that her interest in the naval officer was anything but platonic. Gayle was an eligible bachelor, whose niece described him as "a handsome, dashing man, [who was] very popular with the ladies." Even if they had found each other attractive, Julia could never have permitted herself to develop another intimate relationship with any man. She loved the title "Mrs. Ex-President Tyler" and the quasi-royal status that it implied. Richard Gayle was also eleven years younger than Julia, and elite women lacked the same freedom to form May-December matches as John Tyler had in 1843 and 1844. Above all, protocol guided her actions, and no other presidential widow had ever remarried.

The friendship intensified shortly after Julia reached New York and

---

34Mary Gayle Gorgas, "Captain Richard H. Gayle," Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine, 30 (1949), 207.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
received word that Union forces had captured both the *Cornubia* and its captain during the early morning hours of November 8, 1863. She was aware of the vessel’s importance to the Confederacy because it had been the most successful blockade runner. Of greater concern, however, was the fate of Captain Gayle.

She did not have to wait long for the news. In early December, her friend G. F. Walker, the wife of the Confederate purchasing agent in Bermuda, apprised her of the *Cornubia*'s fate and Richard Gayle's predicament. Shortly after his capture, he took ill, and Union forces placed him under house arrest in a Boston hotel until he recovered. After Gayle regained his health, he went to the Union prison at nearby Fort Warren.35

Word of Richard Gayle's imprisonment troubled Julia enough to place his needs before her own. Initially, she had attempted to any avoid contact with government officials that would reveal her defiance of the Union requirements. Now she decided to initiate a correspondence with Captain Gayle, whose jailers closely monitored all of his mail. Simultaneously, she began to visit old friends and to attend various social functions given by Copperhead Democrats. In Bermuda, her friend G. F. Walker worried about Julia's boldness and advised that she would "not be able to escape observation, as one who bears a less distinguished name." Fully convinced that Union authorities would not interfere with a woman, particularly a well-connected one, Julia cast all caution aside and eventually appealed directly to General John Dix on Captain Gayle's behalf.

Gayle had specific requests to make from the government and wanted Julia to act as an intermediary.\textsuperscript{36}

Now stationed in New York, General Dix was both surprised and annoyed when he received Julia’s letter and learned that she was in New York. Additionally, he certainly must have viewed her appeals for a Confederate prisoner-of-war with disbelief. Past friendship aside, he could only perceive Julia’s actions as arrogant. But Dix had known her for many years and realized that she usually managed to get her way. As a military officer, however, he knew he could not permit his friends openly to defy government directives, and he had no choice but to require Julia to account for her actions. In her own defense, she explained that she had waited from July until October for a reply to the note in which she promised to give her "parole d’honneur" to be inoffensive to the United States government. When no response came, she carried a copy of that note with her as she took the "irregular mode" of reaching her mother’s house. The note would serve to demonstrate that she had made an oath, although it fell short of swearing allegiance to the Union.

Regarding Dix’s inquiry as no more than a trivial annoyance, Julia pressed ahead on the matter of Captain Richard Gayle. Confident that the general would not deport his old friend, she saw no point in backing away from her original concern. As a prisoner-of-war, Gayle had a special request to make, and he wanted Julia to present it in his behalf.

\textsuperscript{36}G. F. Walker to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 10 January 1864. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
I think it quite certain that there will be no general exchange of prisoners for months to come. My only chance, therefore, to get out of prison, is to get a parole, and this is a favor that Genl. Dix has full power to grant. I am an entire stranger at the North, and my simple application would not be noticed. But, my application backed by a request from someone who could influence Genl. Dix, would probably be successful. I cannot think there would be any serious difficulty, for although paroled, I would be just as much a prisoner, as if confined in the strongest casemate at Fort Warren.

Union officials were generous with paroles early in the war, but by 1864 they were less likely to honor requests. Gayle did not know this, and he pushed her to help him get out of Fort Warren. She reinforced his request with a glowing character endorsement, arguing that a man like Captain Gayle could be released on his own reconnaissance. She also inquired about the makeup of the commission which would meet in late March to consider the cases of Confederate naval officers. As if to give Julia encouragement, Captain Gayle again wrote, "Genl. Dix is said to be a gallant gentleman, and he will hardly refuse such a request coming from such a source." Julia was fully aware of Dix's standing as a gentleman and the powerful position he enjoyed. After all he was Commander of the Department of the East. What Julia had failed to understand was his unwillingness to intervene in her behalf.37

After failing to gain Captain Gayle's release, she did everything in her power to make life easier for him. In addition to frequent letters, she often sent gifts of cigars, books, and food. "Your boxes of cake and sherry, my dear Madam, reached here yesterday," Gayle wrote, and "Here is to you, and may the time soon

37Richard Haynsworth Gayle to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 10 March 1864, 20 March 1864 in Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine, 30 (1949), 100, 102.
come when I can pledge you "face to face." Fort Warren had a very liberal policy about gifts and allowed both money and alcoholic beverages. Officers imprisoned there could use what money they had to purchase food and other necessities, and before long Julia began sending money to Captain Gayle. "Bye the bye, will you send me a hundred dollars in Greenbacks? I must ask you to be my banker for a little time longer; for I am so uncertain as to my future movements that I cannot tell when I may want funds."38 She ordinarily responded to such requests as quickly as possible. Writing directly to the officer in charge, Julia would enclose checks drawn on her mother’s account "for the immediate use of Capt. G." There is evidence that she also managed some of his personal funds for him. How either he or Julia converted any of his southern assets into cash that would benefit him at Fort Warren remains a mystery, but Gayle sometimes would ask: "If you have any funds of mine, please send me a draft payable to my order."39

Richard Gayle remained one of Julia’s primary concerns until his exchange in mid-October 1864, and she was only to have a brief respite in her crusade to help him. As soon as he returned to the South, Gayle resumed his job as the commander of a blockade runner, but his success was short lived. The Union Navy captured him January 14, 1865, and once again sent him to Fort Warren, where he quickly renewed correspondence with Julia. He continued his dependence on her throughout the remainder of the war. On April 28, 1865,


39Richard Haynsworth Gayle to Julia Gardiner Tyler, Fort Warren, 18 August 1864. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary
Gayle continued to await release, and Julia did all that she could to console him.40 There were other problems that commanded her attention during the war, none more important than the fate of her children, particularly Gardie.

Initially, he was relatively safe at Washington College, but Julia had no way of knowing how the war might affect the Shenandoah Valley, and Gardie had no easy way of keeping her apprised of his safety. Although familiar with the problem of sending letters across enemy lines, Julia found long periods without a letter from him difficult to bear. Fortunately, other people in Virginia also corresponded with Julia, and their letters often contained a sentence or two about Gardie. James A. Semple went out of his way to keep up with the young man and did what he could to get the information to Staten Island. But Julia found there was no adequate substitute for a letter from her son.

During his early months in college, Gardie began drilling with the Rockbridge Volunteers, a regiment composed mostly of students and professors from Washington College and Virginia Military Institute. By spring, however, he realized that his commitment to the Confederate Army would have to become much more formal. In a letter to Julia, he explained that a recent act of Congress required young men in his age group to enroll in "companies" which "should be liable to active service within their state." Although patriotic and eager to serve, Gardie was not ready to take such a big step alone. Looking to his mother for encouragement, he said: "It would be so much better for you to be here to get me

"As the one member of the family who refused to go to New York, he was not happy about her long stay away from home and took this opportunity to ask, "Pray have you turned traitor?"."\footnote{David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 30 April 1864. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.}

During the spring of 1864, Gardie was uncertain about his immediate plans, for the future, but Julia must have known that his entry into the Confederate Army had been inevitable. In the meantime, he needed both adult counsel and someone to supply his monetary needs. Much to Julia’s delight, James A. Semple stepped in and acted as a surrogate parent. He sent small sums of money to the young man and assumed any other responsibility that he could. After inviting Gardie to spend the summer vacation of 1864 with him in Richmond, Semple notified Julia that he would consult with him about what was best and "pay due deference to his wishes." He reassured her that "I will only advise him as to what I think will be his best course to pursue, remembering what your own wishes would be were you here to take the direction of the matter."\footnote{James A. Semple to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 5 July 1864. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University Library.}

By mid-May 1864 Gardie sent Julia a letter describing the role of cadets from Virginia Military Institute in the Battle of New Market. He regretted that he had not been able to fight along side them. But he would have his chance to fight for the Confederacy later. For now he wanted to apprise Julia that his own company would be in training near Staunton, Virginia, and he advised her not to "be uneasy." But the letter contained plenty that would make her unhappy. He

---

\footnote{David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 30 April 1864. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.}

\footnote{James A. Semple to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 5 July 1864. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University Library.}
informed her that the enemy had returned to Sherwood Forest and made off with the slaves, cattle, and other valuables.\(^{43}\) Aside from worrying about Gardie, she was now angry about loss of property. Sympathy for southern political principles did not prevent her from fearing for her son's safety. The optimism that she had expressed early in the war had dimmed long before. She was no longer certain that God would assist southerners in their battle, even if her son was one of their number.

As Gardie became increasingly involved in the war, Julia struggled to dissuade her sixteen year old son Alex from enlisting in the Confederate forces. Reluctantly she acquiesced and supplied him with a letter of introduction to President Jefferson Davis. She wrote:

The bearer of this will be my second son, John Alexander who has just arrived at his sixteenth year. He leaves me upon sudden notice, going on schooner to Bermuda and from there expects to successfully run the blockade with [sic] Wilmington. I trust his wishes will all be accomplished without danger, but I would fain keep him with me a little longer while a few months more had passed over his head and I could have schooled somewhat more his impulsiveness. This however I in vain seek to impress upon him.\(^{44}\)

Alex's departure was extremely difficult for Julia. She regarded him as "a boy in years," but acknowledged that he had "the spirit of a man & his restlessness was so great" that she "could no longer resist his wishes."\(^{45}\) She realized that his

\(^{43}\)David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, Lexington, Virginia, 22 May 1864. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.


decision was a powerful statement about the war's effects on her own life. As a champion of secession, Julia had been slow to realize the tremendous personal sacrifices that both northern and southern families would have to make. She also began to feel guilty about her own safe situation in New York as Gardie and Alex prepared for military service in the Confederacy.

Alex's entry into the military did not go as smoothly as Gardie's. He wanted to join the Confederate Navy, but the chances of earning a midshipman's commission were slim in 1864. The navy was in serious decline by the time he reached Virginia. James A. Semple took Alex into his home in Richmond and convinced him to enroll in the fall session at Washington College. Gardie reported that Alex was "very much pleased with the place" and was "progressing well in his studies." He remained in Lexington until December when a lack of students threatened to close the college. Alex finally enlisted, but his total military service was about two weeks.

Gardie, on the other hand, served from the spring of 1864 until the end of the war. He remained in a regiment from Rockbridge County whose membership included faculty and students from Washington College. According to Gardie, General Lee's son Robert had once belonged to this unit before receiving a commission and a transfer. When he wrote to his mother, he did not focus on

46 David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, Camp near Laurel Hill, 16 September 1864. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
47 Seager, 499-500.
48 David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, Camp near Laurel Hill, 16 September 1864. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
military engagements but tried to reassure her that he was safe and in good health. Ultimately, Alex joined the Virginia First Artillery Battalion and together with Gardie was present for the last major event of the war. Their units were with General Lee's forces at Appomatox. The Tyler brothers saw less military action than they would have liked, but the important thing for Julia was that they both survived without loss of limbs. Their letters were always slow reaching New York, and Julia's anxiety level correspondingly high.

News from Sherwood Forest was never as encouraging as the news about her sons. In May 1864, she became particularly anxious about her property and the well-being of the two people who lived there. Local residents were particularly frightened when Union General Edward Augustus Wild arrived with his regiment of black troops. According to one local account, "coloured troops [had] taken everything [in] the county [and] have not left five dollars worth on Sherwood Farm." When Julia's slaves abandoned the property, they took the livestock and whatever corn and bacon they found in the store house. Although James A. Semple had not seen the conditions at the plantation himself, he informed Julia that reports were discouraging. After arresting John C. Tyler, Union troops carried him to Fort Monroe and held him as a prisoner. When "Wild's (so-called) African Brigade" arrived, Maria Tyler fled in search of safety in the home of neighbors. Black troops may have frightened Maria, but white

49Seager, 507.
50John C. Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 20 May 1864; William H. Clopton to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 31 May 1864; Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary; James A. Semple to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 30 July 1864. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University
Yankees were much more acceptable. She would soon take one as her husband.

William H. Clopton, one of Julia’s Virginia neighbors, appealed for her help after some of Wild’s men had beaten him. Two young slave women accused Clopton of being a brutal master, and the platoon of former slaves recognized this as an opportunity for retribution against a slaveholder. They stripped Clopton of his clothing and gave him the same kind of whipping that many of them had received as slaves. Julia found the description of Clopton’s brutal treatment at the hands of black soldiers particularly distressing and resolved to do what she could to aid him.51

As a result of her outrage about this state of affairs, Julia appealed to the highest ranking government officials for justice. She began with her old acquaintance, Major General Benjamin F. Butler, who in April 1864 had been given the command of the Union Army of the James for the Department of Virginia and North Carolina. In Julia’s letter to Butler attesting to Clopton’s "character for truth & as a gentleman, & as a master over his servants," she told him that no one knew Clopton any better than she did. "I can assure you a more liberal, kinder master, or one more considerate in every way to his slaves could nowhere be found," she wrote. Julia insisted that Union troops "extend to him the protection you would give a gentleman, and a non-combatant, though a southern man." Although disgusted by Clopton’s whipping, Julia had more

pressing problems. She appealed to Butler for the release of John C. Tyler and for information about the fate of Maria.  

She also took her case directly to President Lincoln. Once again she provided a character reference for William Clopton, and then outlined her own concerns about "John C. Tyler, an elderly nephew of my Husband, & and his orphan cousin . . . [who] without his protection, [was] exposed to a fate I dread even to think of." She also asked, "What has become of my home & its treasures I left at the mercy of those I ventured to suppose would almost sacredly regard them?" Julia drove her point home by appealing directly to Lincoln's sense of honor.

I do beseech you, President Lincoln, by the memory of my Husband, & what you must be assured would have been his course in your place, had your wife appealed to him, remove from me these causes for anxious suspense, which are well calculated to agonize a heart of greater fortitude than mine.

While her appeal to President Lincoln was an extraordinary move for a southern woman, it was completely characteristic of Julia. Her behavior was sometimes compulsive, and in this situation she saw no reason to hesitate. Perhaps few other southern women would have written to Lincoln, but some took actions that were just as unusual. George Rable has written that former First Lady Sarah Childress Polk requested permission to sell crops to Yankee soldiers after Confederate troops had destroyed the bulk of her harvest, while other southern

---

52Julia Gardiner Tyler to Major General Benjamin F. Butler, 21 May 1864. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

53Julia Gardiner Tyler to Abraham Lincoln, 21 May 1864. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
women freely entered into trade with union forces.\textsuperscript{54}

Julia’s letters brought limited results. The most tangible response came from General Wild. Apparently, his superiors had first reprimanded him for the actions of his troops, and he now wrote to notify Julia of the whereabouts of Maria Tyler. After this latest invasion of Union troops, she had taken refuge at the Clopton estate and was there with William Clopton’s wife. Unfortunately, he did little to reassure Julia of Maria’s well-being. Instead, he reported that she was ill and would make a decision about her future as soon as she felt better. Wild offered no information about John C. Tyler, William Clopton, or Sherwood Forest.\textsuperscript{55}

As Julia struggled to determine the fate of Maria and John C. Tyler, a news article appeared in the \textit{New York Evening Post} which commented on conditions at former President Tyler’s home. Noting that at least half of Grant’s army had strolled through the house which remained in reasonably good shape, the author reported that Maria was at the home of a neighbor where she subsisted on the charity of the United States government. Almost immediately, Julia penned an indignant response to the article in which she argued:

\begin{quote}
It would have been more correct to have said that [Maria] fled to the adjoining plantation when deprived of her protector and exposed to the terrible vicinity of an unscrupulous colored soldiery. It is, under these circumstances, a comfort to hear that the charities of the United States are extended to her, since it is the United States government which has
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{54}Rable, 101.

\textsuperscript{55}Brigadier General Edward A. Wild to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 6 June 1864. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
deprived her of the independence and comfort that surrounded her.\textsuperscript{56}

Except for the response she received from General Wild, Julia's letters accomplished nothing. She had few options: she could either keep silent or write letters appealing for justice. At the very least, letter writing gave Julia a means of venting anger and frustration.

Within a few weeks news arrived that Maria had married a Yankee soldier from Buffalo, New York, named John Kick. Descriptions of the groom as an uncouth young man of Dutch descent were enough to give Julia a bad headache. Mrs. Clopton said he was completely lacking in "any of the civilities of life." He "sits in the parlor or dining room & spits on the floor as though he was out of doors." Word from Sherwood Forest was no better; most of the furniture that Julia had left on the estate had been destroyed or stolen. Vandals had ripped velvet upholstery from the sofas in the parlor, crushed mirrors, broken marble busts, and scarred the walls of the mansion. The Cloptons reported that this destruction was the work of General Ambrose Burnside's Army and that Julia's slave, "old Fanny[,] was the leader in tearing down the curtains and gathering things up" to carry away.\textsuperscript{57}

As bad as things were at Sherwood Forest, the problems at Castleton Hill were just as serious. The problem of crowding in Juliana's estate was annoying for all of the adults of the household. Of the nineteen residents, nine were

\textsuperscript{56}Mrs. Tyler's Property," New York Evening Post, 25 June 1864.

\textsuperscript{57}Mrs. William Clopton to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 2 August 1864; John Kick to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 15 September 1864. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
children—six Tyler children, Harry Beeckman, and David's two infants. David found the noisy children particularly irritating, and they became a source of tension between him and Julia. Politics posed an even greater problem. Although all of the Gardiner family had become conservative Democrats when John Tyler left the Whig Party, David's political sympathies during the sectional crisis and the Civil War were firmly on the side of the North. Living under the roof with a mother and sister who identified with the Confederacy, resulted in continuous arguments.

The relationship between David and his mother was unusual. After working briefly in California during the 1850s, he returned to New York upon Alexander's death to manage Gardiner family business for Juliana. David moved into his mother's house and permitted her to impose certain conditions on him. According to family sources, she would never approve of his marrying, unless he and his wife lived under her roof. Apparently, two prior marriage engagements had ended when the women involved refused to live with Juliana. When Sarah Thompson accepted his marriage proposal, she agreed to live at Castleton Hill. Most of the Gardiner's acquaintances were under the impression that David had made his mother the center of his life and had sacrificed career and friends because of his sense of duty to Juliana.\(^{58}\) In 1864, both David and Sarah regarded themselves as permanent residents of Castleton Hill, and Juliana agreed. Julia was the only one who questioned their position in the household.

---

\(^{58}\) Mary Horsford to Julia Gardiner Tyler, [n.p.], 24 July 1869. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
David was largely at fault for the deteriorating relationship with his sister. As noisy children began to grate at his nerves, he reacted violently. Ralph Dayton, the Tyler children's tutor, described one incident. He witnessed David grab one of the smaller children by the neck and drag him toward the door. When Julia sprung to the child's defense, David struck her. Fifteen year old Alex, who was still in New York at the time, tried to defend his mother and brother but was unsuccessful against his much stronger uncle. The row ended after Juliana came down from her bedroom and began to scream.\(^59\) David struck Julia on other occasions too, and conditions in the house finally forced Juliana's hand. She had always been an overbearing woman who attempted to dominate her family, but she was now growing old and had been sick recently. Rather than risk another unpleasant scene by confronting her son, Juliana wrote a letter which requested him to leave her household. She asked him to move to a nearby farm that he owned.\(^60\) David did not understand his mother's motives for putting her request in writing and concluded that Julia had somehow manipulated her. The result of the feud was unfortunate. David never saw his mother again and claimed that he tried to visit on several occasions but was never permitted into her company.

When David left Castleton Hill, Juliana's health was reasonably good for a sixty-five year old. She had always been a hypocondriac and enjoyed complaining,

\(^{59}\)Notes on quarrel between David Lyon Gardiner and Julia Gardiner Tyler, [1865]. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

but did not suffer from a major illness. At this point, her occasional sick bouts were not serious. Over the next several months, however, she became increasingly dependent on Julia, and soon their views seemed to merge. Sometime during this period they decided that Juliana should make a new will to replace an 1858 will that equitably divided the Gardiner estate among Julia, David, and Harry Beeckman, the only surviving heir of Margaret Gardiner Beeckman. On Saturday, October 1, 1864, only three days before Juliana’s death from a severe case of bronchitis, Julia wrote out the provisions they wished inserted in the new will in her own hand and transmitted them to a Mr. Clark, who was a neighboring lawyer. Although she sent the note in Juliana’s name, Clark was cautious enough to call at Castleton Hill on October 3 to inform Julia that he could not prepare a new will without receiving instructions directly from her mother.61

Once satisfied that Juliana had directed the changes in her will and that she could intelligently answer questions about its provisions, the attorney drafted the new document which named Julia as the principal beneficiary. Julia did not permit him to see Juliana on Monday, but he returned to interview her on the morning of Tuesday, October 4, 1864, the day of her death. One of the provisions, which Mr. Clark verified gave Julia, "without limitation," the entire rental income on property designated for David, until such time that the federal government made restitution for losses to the Tyler estate in Virginia. She also inherited Castleton Hill, which had an unpaid mortgage. Another provision required that profits from David’s inheritance pay the balance of that mortgage.

---

61Tiffany, 560-561.
These provisions placed serious limitations on David's share of Juliana's legacy and insured continued animosity between brother and sister. Mr. Clark rejected another provision that would have named Julia as guardian of Margaret's son Harry and given her freedom to invest his share of the estate as she saw fit. New York State law did not permit Juliana to name a guardian for her grandson, and Mr. Clark substituted the word "trustee" for guardian.62

The interview between Juliana and Mr. Clark took place at nine o'clock, and Julia summoned him to return at noon because her mother was dying. Although she managed to get both a physician and an attorney to her mother's bedside, she did not notify David that his mother was close to death. If her action was deliberate, Julia made a serious mistake by not giving her brother the opportunity to see Juliana before she died. In the court challenges that followed, judges were most critical on this point. David's presence at his mother's bedside would have complicated the last minute execution of the will. Juliana's minister did arrive at the house, and Julia did not permit him to enter the sick room either.

The urgency of completing the new will made the scene in Juliana's bedroom particularly morbid. The physician, Dr. Rice, reassured Clark that she was of sound mind and capable of executing a will, but Juliana may have been so sick that she simply did not care about what was going on around her. While discussing provisions of the will, Julia held her mother's head as she vomited. Sometimes the dying Juliana could only nod her head or use monosyllables to give her consent to the new provisions. Finally, Julia raised her in the bed, and she

62Ibid.
affixed her signature to the document. Ralph Dayton and Dr. Rice witnessed the will.

When David successfully contested the will, Julia took the case to the New York State Supreme Court. Aside from the obvious inequities in the provisions of Juliana's will, other issues clouded the outcome of the case. One was political: David L. Gardiner was a loyal, patriotic son of the North, but his sister was an unrepentant rebel—a traitor against the government of the United States.

Several months before when a lower court denied the will admission to probate on August 29, 1865, Julia was the victim of an embarrassing incident that attracted the attention of newspapers. Some local youths forced their way into Castleton Hill and ripped a banner from the wall which they mistakenly reported as a rebel flag. In its account of the incident, one newspaper article added, "You are aware that we are blest with having as a resident among us Mrs. Tyler, widow of the deceased rebel ex-President John Tyler. She seems to be successful in passing the lines of our army, and of returning at her pleasure, and with her two eldest sons in the rebel army would seem to be a privileged person."63 The rebel flag incident generated so much attention that Gardie was able to read the story in northern newspapers that reached Virginia.64 Julia did not need this negative publicity as she prepared to battle David in court.

Another problem arose since a woman had deprived a male heir of

---

63 *New York Herald*, 17 April 1865.

64 David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, Lexington, Virginia, 28 May 1865. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
property. If the witnesses who signed the new will correctly represented Juliana's intentions, she made a new will because her daughter had greater needs than her son. Ironically, the Gardiner estate had originated with a woman. When she married David Gardiner in 1816, Juliana legally lost control of her property. When her husband died intestate in 1844, New York State law provided for division of the property equally among the children and only granted Juliana the right of dower. Subsequently, all four Gardiner children relinquished claims to the estate by signing their inheritance over to their mother.

The New York Supreme Court upheld the provisions of the new will, but David contested the ruling and took his case to the New York State Court of Appeals.65 In a four to three decision, the appellate court ruled that Julia had exercised undue influence in her mother's decision to execute a new will. They rejected evidence of Juliana's noble intention of providing for a widowed daughter and her seven children who had been deprived of home and property because of the war. Juliana had expressed her decision to friends several weeks before her death, and they provided testimony before the Court. She had also made her intentions known to the attorney as she lay dying. But the Court demonstrated little interest in the mother's concern for her daughter's plight. Instead the majority opinion of the Court expressed the conviction that Julia "was the only member of the family, who independent of the testatrix, had a large property in her own right." The Court rejected claims of Julia's property losses in Virginia as

65In New York State, the Court of Appeals is actually a higher court than the State Supreme Court.
false, and contended that she had "left her father's house the year he died, and returned home at a time when her mother bore the fatal marks of organic diseases." The judges' remarks were unfounded. No matter what role Julia may have played in the execution of a new will, her love for her mother was genuine, and the charge that she returned home for financial gain was false.

Those jurists who dissented from the majority opinion found nothing improper or illegal about the execution of Juliana's will. They noted that only David claimed that his mother's mental faculties had failed, and he had not seen her in eight months. These jurists also reasoned that Julia and Juliana's request that David move out of Castleton Hill was reasonable and "eminently right." Someone needed to leave the overcrowded house, and the question was who that person should have been. As they answered their own question, the dissenting jurists asked:

The daughter, a widow, with six children, with no home elsewhere, or the son?—a man, with a wife and three children, and one of the handsomest farms on the island to go to, within two and one-half miles of his mother. Should she request her son to go to his farm, "one of the best on the island," or should she send her daughter, with her six children, into the street? The mother did as a kind mother ordinarily would, she sought to keep them all in her house, though to her great discomfort.

Evidence from both sides convinced these jurists that Juliana had attempted to keep her family together as long as she could, but the arguments of David and Julia finally forced Juliana to take action. "The mother's decision, as to which one should leave, was the decision that every true woman in the land would have made, under like circumstances."66

---

66Ibid, 598-599.
The dissenting jurists recognized the losses which Julia had incurred as a result of the war as a legitimate reason for Juliana's new will. These men agreed with the ruling of the state Supreme Court but were unable to convince the Appeals Court majority that they had no legal justification for ruling against Julia. Rather than focusing on legal grounds, the other judges may have been swayed by Julia's political liabilities. A court decision that favored a sister over a brother was uncommon in nineteenth-century New York and challenged the traditional social order. Additionally, Julia's high profile as a Confederate and a Copperhead Democrat may have influenced the decision. Legal battles over her mother's estate began in 1865 and did not end until 1867. During this struggle, President Lincoln had been assassinated, the war had ended, and sectional bitterness continued in both sections of the nation.

Despite her troubles during the war years, Julia was more fortunate than most southern women. Money and political influence had enabled her to escape the dangers posed by invading armies. During those years, only two family members had died, and they were not casualties of war. Both Gardie and Alex survived their service in the Confederate military, and Julia had succeeded in keeping her other children safe. Although the war resulted in the estrangement of her brother David, the breach in family relations did not bother her nearly as much as the damages sustained by Sherwood Forest and the loss of Villa Margaret.

---

67 In her book, *In the Eyes of the Law: Women, Marriage, and Property in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), Norma Basch has described many probate cases involving widows in nineteenth-century New York in the book. Although Basch does not address the problem of siblings, she describes a judicial system that was reluctant to accept more progressive state legislation which favored women in probate cases.
at Old Point. Court battles with David had hardened Julia's resolve to defend her own interests, and she now had every intention of demanding full restitution of her properties from the federal government. Circumstances of the Civil War had forced Julia to veer away from the traditional female role that she had publicly espoused in her 1853 defense of slavery. Julia would never identify with those who espoused equal rights for women, but she would not allow gender considerations to prevent her from doing whatever was necessary to make life better for herself or her children.
A Faithful Votary of Her Creator

After the war, Julia continued to direct most of her attention to her family. She viewed education as a major priority and did whatever was necessary to place her children in the schools and colleges that best suited their needs. The task was not easy because she experienced financial problems throughout the 1870s. But Julia had no other choice. Since she had always regarded education as essential to the formation of men and women of her own class, she sent her children to school and worried about the bills later. Family matters and finances were seldom separate issues, and sometimes there was not enough money to pay debts on a timely basis. Julia tried to resolve her financial problems during this period, but there were no easy solutions. As her problems intensified, she turned to religion for answers and became more introspective and somewhat more tolerant of people outside of her own race and class.

After the New York Court of Appeals overturned Juliana Gardiner’s deathbed will, attorneys for Julia and David reached a compromise settlement. Available evidence suggests that she managed to hold on to Castleton Hill and some of Juliana’s Manhattan rental property. In spite of the acquisition of this handsome New York residence, she continued to worry about Sherwood Forest and Villa Margaret at Old Point Comfort. Legally, both estates belonged to her, and the federal government’s continued unauthorized use of Villa Margaret was a
constant source of irritation. Julia’s main objective was to retain Sherwood Forest as a legacy for her children. Gardie and Alex were anxious for their mother to resume residence there, but Julia was ambivalent about returning to the South. Frequent correspondence with Virginia friends only served to remind her that life had changed drastically along the James River.

The war had destroyed the economy of eastern Virginia and left many of the plantations in ruins. Both the house and the fields of Sherwood Forest displayed wartime neglect and the ill-effects of military occupation during the latter part of the war. An 1868 description written by Gardie best described conditions in Charles City County:

This is undoubtedly the poorest county in the state now. I don’t believe there are half a dozen conveyances of any sort, exclusive of that horrible instrument of torture called by the natives a "tumbler cart" in the whole country. Of the fine horses owned by nearly every gentleman anterior to the war you never see one; even a broken minded mule is now considered a god send. Desolation has set its seal upon all around us and a gloom like the vale of the grave has settled upon the land. Sherwood looks as forlorn as ever, and everything is going to yet greater ruin.¹

According to Richard Lowe, "conditions in the rural areas along the banks of the James River" were poor. Army campfires had consumed hundreds of miles of fencing, and arsonists had reduced countless homes and barns to ashes. Confederate currency no longer had any value, and farm tools and animals were either worn out or missing.² Allen W. Moger has written that "the most

---

¹David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, Sherwood Forest, 27 June 1868. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University.

impoverished areas in Virginia" after 1865 "were the same areas where wealth in
slaves had been greatest before the war." More specifically, he referred to the
counties along the James River as some of the most destitute. More fortunate
than her Virginia neighbors, Julia had only to remain in New York to avoid much
of the depression and misery experienced by residents of Charles City County
during the postwar years. There was a peculiar irony about her continued sojourn
in the North after the war had ended. Julia had for years expressed intense
dissatisfaction with northern people, but she remained in their midst. Her motive
was simple. Julia was unwilling to sacrifice elegance and comfort for political
principles. Yet she wanted to see prosperity return to eastern Virginia for the
sake of her sons and her Charles City County friends.

Worry about her eastern Virginia property inspired a letter to President
Andrew Johnson, but this letter was different from others that she had written to
high ranking government officials in the past. Always very proud of her own
personal influence, Julia had believed the use of the name "Mrs. Ex-president
Tyler" was a way of obtaining immediate assistance. But war time experiences had
caused her to doubt the effectiveness of her title, so she signed the letter
"Americus." Additionally, she may have been aware of President Johnson's
contempt for aristocratic southerners. In any case, she made a strong appeal in
behalf of the South.

"Now President Johnson," she wrote," you can redeem yourself in the hearts

3Allen W. Moger, Virginia: Bourbonism To Byrd 1870-1925 (Charlottesville:
University of Virginia Press, 1968), 80.
of your real fellow countrymen, your ... fellow citizens of the South whose blood runs in your veins." The letter, which recalled the bitterness of the war and the pain of the southern defeat, could have been written by any elite southern woman who lamented the loss of loved-ones, property, and wealth. Insensitive to national mourning for Abraham Lincoln, Julia assailed the dead president as the cause of all southern misery and observed that he now stood before the judgment seat of God, with widows and fatherless children as his accusers. But she added:

> There is no cause for such hatred of you; you have only to move in the right way, the way of righteousness ... with a memory of the terrible trials & sufferings that have rent the hearts & souls of your own people in flesh & blood, to be blessed ... by them & condemned only by those whose bloodthirstiness has cried. Win for yourself a place in their hearts & your niche in the temple of Fame will be loftier than any that have gone before you from the councils of the Nation.

Instead of identifying herself as a southerner, Julia told Johnson that he had "the prayer of a Northern lady who though surrounded by Northern fanaticism, cannot be blinded to the fact that Nature's noblemen, one of which you have the honor to be, surely populate the South."4

When she wrote her letter, Julia hoped Johnson could heal the wounds left by the war quickly enough to ease her own financial burden. She was anxious to see Sherwood Forest recover and wrote as much to James Lyons, a Tyler family friend who practiced law in Richmond:

> I want to do something for myself on the farm if I have it in my power in order to lengthen out my purse which you can imagine, with all these children to look after & educate requires [it] to be of some length. I feel the loss of all assistance from my ... Virginia property severely. I often

---

4Julia Gardiner Tyler to President Andrew Johnson, nd. np. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
think, suppose my mother had left me nothing here... what would have become of us?5

Although Julia took comfort in the knowledge that her inheritance kept the family solvent, much of her financial security depended on Sherwood Forest. There were liens against the plantation as a result of debts that John Tyler had contracted before he died. If Julia could find a way of reviving the wheat fields at Sherwood Forest, she could begin paying some of the Tyler creditors.

During the late spring of 1865, she devised an interesting scheme for putting her plantation back to work. John C. Tyler had returned to Sherwood Forest after a brief detention by General Wild's forces. He remained there as caretaker, and Julia asked him to supervise a sharecropping arrangement involving Swedish immigrants rather than freedmen. Since Alex had explained the scheme to him, Tyler wrote to Julia for clarification:

As I understand the plan, it is that, you furnish each family with a few acres of ground for their own use, they to give four days labour to you, and two days for themselves, you to provide for them until they shall have made the first crop; then they are to provide for themselves without your assistance, and continue the remainder of three years to perform the same proportion of labour as above mentioned for you.6

Key to the plan was a Swede named Sievert von Oertzen who attempted to do whatever he could to farm the Tyler plantation successfully. By July he had obtained two old army horses that he hoped to use for plowing the fields in order to plant turnips, beans, and potatoes, the only crops that could be planted so late

5Julia Gardiner Tyler to James Lyons, nd., np. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

6John C. Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 10 July 1865. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
in the season. The time for planting wheat and corn had already passed. Unfortunately, the plan was too ambitious. John C. Tyler had warned Julia that the four Swedish immigrant families would need financial support until the first harvest came in, but she did not respond. In 1865 as she awaited final settlement of her mother’s estate, Julia had enough difficulty meeting her own financial obligations without committing herself to the support of anyone else.

Before long, von Oertzen discovered that his task was nearly impossible. A summer drought had made "the ground so hard that not two horses [were] able to get a plough through" the earth. He complained that they were "waiting for rain or money or both" but had already waited too long to plant wheat.\(^7\) Von Oertzen noted that they subsisted on "milk and peaches and peaches and milk mornings, noons and nights." As Julia’s sharecropping plan fell apart, she failed to understand that the plantation was no longer as productive as it had been before the war. Occasionally, she sent money to John C. Tyler and von Oertzen, but the amounts were never sufficient. They needed to buy fertilizer, new tools, and other farm supplies. The tenant farmers also needed high energy diets to sustain them as they toiled the fields in the hot, humid Virginia summer. Without ample financial support, the experiment with white laborers could not work. By late September von Oertzen and the other farmers had failed.\(^8\) In the meantime, John C. Tyler and Gardie suggested employing black sharecroppers, and Julia left

\(^7\)Sievert von Oertzen to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 3 September 1865. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

\(^8\)Seager, 514.
them to their own ingenuity.

Sherwood Forest was only one of her problems; the condition of Villa Margaret also continued to worry her. One of the first estates in eastern Virginia to be seized during the war, it housed Union troops from 1861 until 1865. Although she had protested this to President Lincoln and other federal officials during the war, the Freedmen's Bureau took control of the property in 1866 and used the house to lodge northern white missionary teachers who came South to teach freedmen in the Hampton area. The U. S. government did pay Julia $40 per month while the teachers occupied her house, but she did not regain control until 1868 after "it was shorn of its beauty, the furniture gone, the outbuildings destroyed & and the grounds covered with Negro huts." During the summer of 1869, she was still attempting to evict freedmen from Villa Margaret but was ambivalent about the future of the estate. Briefly, she considered cultivating strawberries on the entire property, but that idea was not very realistic. She needed profits from her land, and strawberries were not likely to yield much reward.

The more important decision was whether to rent or sell Villa Margaret. She corresponded with a business agent in Hampton who was willing to rent the house. He found a prospective renter who backed out of the agreement because

---


10G. M. Peek to Julia Gardiner Tyler, Hampton, 12 July 1869. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
Julia kept changing her requirements. Ultimately, she decided to sell but could not get much for the estate. Land in eastern Virginia did not bring good prices during the late 1860s, and the estate was in poor shape. James A. Semple agreed to represent her in this matter but had a difficult time finding a key that would enable him to examine the estate for himself. Sometime after 1868, Julia attempted to sell Villa Margaret to the federal government. She tried to convince President Grant that it was "a desirable piece of property for the government to possess," since it was "near the Artillery School which you have instituted." But the government had no interest in purchasing Villa Margaret.

While Julia anxiously sought a buyer for the Hampton property, she was at risk of losing Sherwood Forest because of liens against the plantation. James A. Semple, again acting as her representative, discovered that small bills totalling one thousand dollars encumbered the plantation. Many of these bills dated from the 1850s, and each had accrued interest. According to Semple, Julia only needed to "give [her] note with a satisfactory endorser, payable at 60 or 90 days for the principal [and] the interest will not be claimed." He offered to give his own name as a guarantor and assured her that the creditors would honor his endorsement. In order to expedite the process, Semple sent his signature to her on a blank note.

---


12 Julia Gardiner Tyler to Ulysses S. Grant, nd. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University.
which she could complete by adding "the amount desired."\textsuperscript{13} Whether Julia accepted his offer or not is unknown, but a decision to decline his help would have been foolish. There seemed to be no end to the Tylers' old debts. In 1866, she received a $180.00 bill from Gideon Christian for medical services rendered while she was still in residence at Sherwood Forest. The bill would have been larger if the physician had included treatment of the slaves, but he noted that "they have promised to liquidate them on their own responsibility."\textsuperscript{14} He did not press for settlement of Julia's account after she explained that her "pecuniary affairs were somewhat straitened." She soon learned how freely creditors exchanged information with one another when Christian wrote after "Mr. Graves told me on Saturday he had given the bond due from Mr. Tyler to Graves & Christian to Mssrs. Apperson Godden & Co. of Richmond for collection." Since Julia had found the money to pay Graves & Christian, Dr. Christian now asked, "Will you let me have a portion of my medical bill by October?"\textsuperscript{15} When another physician pressed for payment of an old bill owed by the Tylers, Julia apologized and explained, "I seem to have completely succumbed to the disturbed financial state of the times. As you must have observed in the course of the dreadful shrinkage of values of late years those who though themselves [are] well

\textsuperscript{13}James A. Semple to Julia Gardiner Tyler, Hampton, Virginia, 12 September 1867. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University.

\textsuperscript{14}Gideon Christian to Julia Gardiner Tyler, Charles City County, nd. 1866. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

\textsuperscript{15}Gideon Christian to Julia Gardiner Tyler, Charles City County, Virginia, 7 August 1866. Tyler Family Papers. Virginia Historical Society.
off... suffer more deeply than those who apparently [have no] property."16

Times were hard, and the economy would not improve any time soon. As the nation moved toward the depression of 1873, Julia seldom passed a day without worrying about her diminishing economic independence.

By the time Villa Margaret sold in 1874, Sherwood Forest was once again in danger because of a $1300 judgment against the estate. The sale of the villa brought only $3400, and Julia was lucky to get that. In any case, she received the money in ample time to save the plantation from public sale.17 The value of her assets and the amount of her total indebtedness during the period from 1865 to 1875 are difficult to assess. Family papers contain numerous bills and evidence of repeated attempts at collection. One thing is certain: financial instability was a fact of life for Julia after the Civil War. She could no longer live free of economic worries, and the adjustment was not easy. Sometimes she made choices without thinking about the consequences, and the result was greater indebtedness. Yet in spite of her worries about money, Julia decided to do all that she could to make the world more pleasant for her children and her friends.

Former Confederate First Lady Varina Davis was one friend who was not at all reluctant to request Julia’s assistance. Describing herself as a prisoner in Georgia, she wanted to get her children away from "Yankee influences." "My Mother... goes on to New York for the purpose of taking my poor little children

---

16Julia Gardiner Tyler to Dr. Clark, nd. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

17Seager, 542.
to school in Canada," she wrote. "As we are very poor, economy is a great item in our calculations, so I must beg of you to get them a cheap and quiet place if you can by your superior knowledge of the New York locality."\textsuperscript{18} Since Varina Davis often referred to Julia as her lovely stepmother, their relationship was sufficiently strong to enable one woman to ask a favor of the other.\textsuperscript{19} Varina’s idea of getting her children out of the country impressed Julia. Although she had become increasingly comfortable with her own life in New York, sending her children abroad for an education seemed an appealing way of helping Gardie, Alex, and Julie.

The outcome of the war had left Gardie and Alex bitter and hostile to the authority of the federal government. When the war ended both enrolled in classes at Washington College in Lexington, Virginia, but they were too distracted by their own feelings of anger and humiliation to concentrate on their studies. Like many young Confederates, they were ready to flee the country rather than submit to Yankee rule. When Julia suggested that they consider attending college in Europe, neither required any coaxing. Gardie had been despondent for some time and had written Julia that he would "always brood over the present condition of our unhappy country." Indeed, he asked, "How can I call myself happy when I

\textsuperscript{18}Varina Howell Davis to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 24 July 1865. \textit{Tyler's Quarterly Magazine}, XVII (July 1935), 24.

\textsuperscript{19}Varina Davis stretched the definition of stepmother. Her sister married William G. Waller, the son of Elizabeth Tyler Waller. Elizabeth was the daughter of John Tyler and his first wife Letitia Semple.
think of it?"  

In September, Gardie, Alex, and Harry Beeckman sailed to Germany in hopes of attending college in Karlsruhe. Julia had become Harry's guardian upon the death of Juliana, and she assumed full responsibility for his education also. The voyage across the Atlantic lifted their spirits because nearly all passengers on board their vessel were southerners. Writing from the steamship *Hausa*, Gardie reported, "We talk 'Secesh' as much as we please and sing southern songs on deck every evening."  

He hoped to enroll in the military academy at Karlsruhe and obtain a thorough military education before enrolling in the Polytechnic School to study agriculture, botany, forestry, and chemistry. Although fluent in French, Gardie intended to master German while there, and Julia encouraged him to make every effort to do well. Unfortunately, he was unable to stop worrying about southern problems after he reached his destination. In her occasional letters, Julia apprised him of all recent political developments, but the information only whetted his appetite for more. In December he wrote, "Do send me a weekly paper, I am dreadfully anxious to hear the news."  

A few months later Julia sent him news of the two colleges in Lexington, Virginia. Cadets at Virginia

---

20David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 28 July 1865. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

21David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 17 September 1865. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.


23David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 26 December 1865. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
Military Institute and the students at neighboring Washington College had "turned the Yankee Garrison out of the town." Marvelling over this development, Gardie commented, "By Jove! There's life in the old land yet."\textsuperscript{24}

Not all of his letters to his mother were about politics. Often his exchanges with Julia expressed anger and impatience. Nothing annoyed Gardie more than her short, infrequent letters, and he was quick to remind her that she would be offended if he treated her with similar neglect.\textsuperscript{25} Alcoholic beverages were another point of contention between mother and sons. Harry Beeckman had already exhibited his inability to handle strong drink, and Julia worried about Gardie's consumption of liquor. She demanded that all three abstain from alcohol, and Gardie responded by saying:

I will give you the promise you wish, that is for a stipulated time, but not indefinitely as circumstances might occur which might cause me to break it. I promise not to drink any intoxicating liquor for one year or until I see you again. That will satisfy you, I hope. Tisn't [sic] much of a deprivation to me as I don't like beer.\textsuperscript{26}

Gardie regretted the promise almost as soon as he had made it and told Julia as much:

I have come to the conclusion that you had better absolve us from the promise we gave you not to drink. The Germans consider it really a breach of etiquette not to partake of jovial bowl. I have felt really sheepish in being pressed to take a glass of wine, to say that I was a temperance

\textsuperscript{24}David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 14 February 1866. College of William & Mary.

\textsuperscript{25}David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 28 March 1866. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

\textsuperscript{26}David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 14 July 1866. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
Such persons are regarded as Quakers or Blue-stockings. For myself I care nothing for wine or beer as you yourself well know, but in this country while pursuing a student’s retired or rather inactive life, one certainly needs some sort of stimulant.27

Gardie continued to express anger about his temperance pledge, noting that it "cut off... all social enjoyment." Finally he vowed, "It is the last temperance pledge you’ll ever get from me."28 In spite of all of his protests, Julia did not absolve Gardie of his promise to abstain from strong drink. Alcohol dependency was not a problem for either Gardie or Alex, but this was a chance that Julia did not want them to take. Harry’s tendency to drink too much was troublesome, and she feared that one of her own children might develop the same affliction.

Unfortunately, there was a far more serious problem that she had failed to consider before encouraging her sons to go to school in Germany. Julia had limited money and an inadequate understanding of her own resources. When Gardie and Alex sailed to Europe, she was in the middle of her legal battle over Juliana’s will and was confident of winning the lawsuit initiated by her brother David. Given the liens against Sherwood Forest in 1866, sending children to study abroad was financially reckless. She did not have enough money to make financial commitments without first having some knowledge of how she would pay creditors, educate children, and provide for the daily support of the rest of her family.

Unaware of his mother’s financial difficulties, Gardie wrote, "Last week I [sent] a

27David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 19 October 1866. Tyler Family Letters. College of William & Mary.

28David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 28 August 1866. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
long letter explaining things in general, and in particular acquainting you with our want of the *almighty dollar*. I have been forced to forego the luxury of a cigar."

Gardie and Alex were in debt to John Fulton, a New York Copperhead who was both their friend and mentor in Karlsruhe. Julia cleared up that matter, and Gardie thanked her for making him "feel once more like a free man by defraying Mr. Fulton's debt."²⁹ Student life was not cheap in Germany. According to Gardie, "gentleman" students required about 1500 guldens or $600 in gold per year. Additionally, Gardie and Alex required private tutors because they did not know enough German to enroll in university classes.³⁰ Financially, Julia had made an unwise decision in sending them to Germany.

Following the example of Varina Davis, she decided to send her seventeen year old daughter Julie to Canada to school, in spite of the financial struggle to support the boys in Germany. Gardie thought his mother's idea was good, "far better than to allow [Julie] to stay with you and waste her time in useless pleasure."³¹ In the search for a reputable school for Julie, Julia once again turned to James A. Semple for assistance. During the years following the Civil War, he developed numerous contacts in Canada after refusing to sign a loyalty oath to the federal government. Something of a southern conspirator who

²⁹David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 15 June 1866. College of William & Mary.

³⁰David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 28 August 1866. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

³¹David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 28 March 1866. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
retained close ties with Confederate sympathizers living in Nova Scotia, Semple helped Julia identify a Catholic boarding school for Julie there.\textsuperscript{32} During the early spring of 1866, he escorted her to the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Halifax. Their trip was a long one, but Semple reported that Julie especially enjoyed the cruise from Portland, Maine, to Nova Scotia because "she had a West Pointer in tow" and had obtained "two photographs of him."\textsuperscript{33} Like her mother, Julie was a flirt, but the Sisters of the Sacred Heart would limit her access to male company. On Julia’s instructions, Semple arranged for John Taylor Wood, a Confederate expatriate who lived in Halifax, to serve as Julie’s guardian. Not nearly as self-confident about boarding school as Julia had been at the same age, Julie quickly became homesick and despondent. The city was not at all to her liking, and she wrote as much to her mother. "Oh! How I hate this place and all the Englishmen in it. I was disgusted with it as soon as I reached St. John’s. I want to get to the convent as quick as possible."\textsuperscript{34} Fortunately, she did not have to worry about finding an English atmosphere inside of the convent.

The nuns belonged to a French order, and Julie hoped they would enable her to build on the French lessons that she had taken with Hortense before the war. The curriculum was demanding and prevented her from focusing on the many facets of Halifax society that she did not like. Besides French, she enrolled

\textsuperscript{32}Seager, 519.

\textsuperscript{33}James A. Semple to Julia Gardiner Tyler, Halifax, 6 April 1866. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University.

\textsuperscript{34}Julie Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 5 April 1866. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University Library.
in English grammar, geography, history, philosophy, rhetoric, music, and
drawing.\textsuperscript{35} Her courses occupied so much of her time that she was no longer
homesick by the end of the month. Content with her own progress, she expressed
satisfaction with school. But Julie was annoyed because her mother seldom sent
letters. She was unsure of whether there was a problem at home, or whether
Julia was too busy with her "numerous admirers" to write.\textsuperscript{36} Things had come
full circle. As a school girl Julia had complained that her father did not write her
letters. Yet as parent she was particularly tardy about answering the letters of her
children. There were numerous reasons why Julia failed to answer her children's
letters regularly. The first reason Julie knew well: her mother rarely declined
invitations from those men and women who sought her company. But Julia's
social life had never prevented her from writing letters in the past. What Julie
failed to remember was that her mother had sole responsibility for four younger
children who required constant care and supervision. Additionally, financial
worries and the legal battles over Juliana's estate appear to have consumed most
of Julia's energy in 1866.

While away at school, her children needed money for a variety of practical
reasons, but Julia was hard pressed to find the cash required to fund all of their
needs. Like most boarding school students, Julie required suitable clothing and
other goods from local shops, and with John Taylor Wood's approval, merchants

\textsuperscript{35}Julie Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 6 May 1866. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale
University.

\textsuperscript{36}Julie Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 21 April 1866. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale
University Library.
extended credit to her. Wood directed creditors to forward bills to Julia, and when payments failed to materialize, they expected him to honor the debts.

Before long Wood found himself in an awkward situation. The unpaid bills were a source of local embarrassment, and a friend advised him that Mrs. Ex-president Tyler had serious financial problems. Although he had already instructed merchants to press their claims against Julia, Wood paid the bills himself because creditors continued to annoy him. When he finally billed Julia for the amount in 1869, the sum, including interest was $370.37

Cost was probably the main reason why Julie did not return to the convent school after the summer vacation. When school recessed in late June of 1866, Julie still did not know that she would be unable to return in the fall. Julia also reduced the cost of her sons' education by bringing Gardie back to the United States. He had developed no aptitude for German and was unable to learn the language well enough to enroll in classes at the university. The decision to bring him home was an easy one, and Gardie fully concurred. Once back in the United States, he returned to Washington College. Alex, however, perfected German and remained to study mining engineering at the Polytechnic School in Karlsruhe. Like Gardie, Harry Beeckman also returned from Germany and

---

37Burton N. Harrison to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 8 January 1869. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

38Julie Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, Halifax, 6 May 1866. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University.

enrolled at Washington College.

Even though Gardie viewed Washington College as the best college in the nation because of its president, General Robert E. Lee, he continued to find postwar politics frustrating. In the spring of 1869, he considered leaving the country again to participate in a military uprising in Cuba. But his mother wasted no time advising against such extreme action. "I am of the opinion," she wrote, "and I think that you will agree with me, that at present, it would be but a poor policy for the Southerners to help free a foreign land when their own is in so much need of it." Julia's role was not easy. Although she spent most of her time helping each of her children plan for the future, Gardie was the one who seemed to command the most attention. During this period he continued to focus on southern problems, and his restlessness worried Julia. Fortunately, he was willing to listen and heed her advice.

Julia's efforts to educate her children in spite of financial difficulties were admirable. By 1870, Lachlan began medical studies at New York College of Physicians and Surgeons, and he engaged in the same pattern of begging his mother for money as his older brothers: "50.00 [sic] per month doesn't go very far after paying on an average of $8.00 per week for board etc. Well I have about $3.00 per week for pocket money. You mustn't be backward about letting me have $5.00 or $10.00 once in awhile; for I won't ask for it unless it is necessary."40 After Lonie began his studies at the University of Virginia, he,

---

40Lachlan Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 5 December 1870. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University.
too, had constant need of money. In 1872, he wrote, "I have spent here . . . about $375.00 so if you send me the $200.00 I will have received about $575.00 or $600.00. I can assure you that there is scarcely a student that has got through on less."41 Always trying to keep her children solvent at school, Julia attempted to reassure her son Fitzwalter, a student at Georgetown College, after sending him a check for ten dollars. "Remember I have . . . still Lonie at college, [but] that will soon be done . . . & your time will be better, so don't feel discouraged. Give me a list of your necessary payments that can't be put off until December."42 While Fitzwalter studied at Georgetown, Julia enrolled Pearlie at the neighboring Georgetown Academy of the Visitation, a Catholic boarding school operated by an order of nuns. The pattern of educational indebtedness, delinquencies, and late payments of bills continued. But Julia had no alternative. She had to educate her children. After all, they had descended from two prominent American families and would need proper education in order to take their places in the professions. Perhaps Julia's greatest difficulty was that the educational expenses only increased her financial difficulties. Fortunately, each of her children would eventually become independent.

Julie was the first of the Tyler children to go out on her own. In spite of Gardie's vigorous protests, his sister Julie became romantically involved with a "Yankee" sometime during 1868. The man, William H. Spencer, owned a farm in

41Lyon Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, University of Virginia, 16 May 1872. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

42Julia Gardiner Tyler to Fitzwalter Tyler, 18 September (paper fray at year). Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
the western New York town of Tuscarora. Julie was only nineteen years old, and
the courtship caused her mother many anxious moments. Always concerned about
proper chaperoning and the appearance of propriety, Julia demanded discretion
and accountability. In 1868 after vacationing with Julie and Spencer in Saratoga
Springs, Julia permitted them to travel to Tuscarora alone. After failing to make
the proper train connections in Albany, they reached Rochester too late to travel
to Tuscarora by rail. When Julia learned that they had arrived there later than
scheduled, she immediately apprised them of her displeasure. The tone of her
letter was so sharp that Julie said that "its scolding words took away all pleasure of
the evening." Reassuring her mother that they had tried "not to over step any
bounds of propriety," she explained: "We did have a queer funny sort of trip from
Saratoga." After arriving in Rochester late, they could only do one of two things:

stay at a noisy hotel all night which as a poor unprotected female would
have been so unpleasant or drive up to Geneseo which as Mr. S tried to
convince me would not take long and as I wanted to get the journey over
with as soon as possible we drove. But Mamma do not blame me for this,
for being under the charge of Mr. Spencer (I shall never forgive you for it)
I felt bound to do as he considered best, so we drove up and in due time
reached Tuscarora.43

Little is known about William Spencer's background, but Julia liked him well
enough to consent to his marriage to Julie. The wedding took place in New York
City on June 26, 1869, and the couple went to live in Tuscarora.

Julie did not adjust to rural life as readily as her mother had when she
moved to Sherwood Forest in 1845. She found Tuscarora and nearby Geneseo

43Julie Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 26 August 1868. Gardiner Family Papers.
Yale University.
much too provincial and disliked the gossip that was a local pastime. Julie turned to her correspondence as a means of transcending small town life, though her mother responded infrequently. However, Julie did not have to endure small town life for long. In 1871, she died after giving birth to a baby girl who was also named Julia. Nicknamed "Baby," the infant went to live with Julia while Will attempted to pull himself out of debt and find a way to rear his daughter comfortably. Eventually, he faded out of Baby's life altogether, and Julia assumed full responsibility for her. Caring for the child was not enough to distract Julia from some of the pain of Julie's death. This loss hurt her more than any other death she had experienced.

Unfortunately, her older children were not in New York to console her. Writing from Sherwood Forest, Gardie said, "The dreadful intelligence of Sister's death completely stupefied me. No warning, no premonitions, and even yet on this the third day I can scarcely believe it more than a horrid dream which to-morrow will dispel." Julia had notified Gardie by telegram, but she failed to do the same for Lonie who was at the University of Virginia. He was grief stricken after reading about his sister's death in a newspaper. He wrote that he hoped the baby girl had been named Julia for her mother and grandmother. This tragedy

44 Information about Julie Tyler's life in Tuscarora comes from the collection of letters in folders 213, 214, and 215 of the Gardiner Family Collection at Yale University.

45 David Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, Sherwood Forest, 13 May 1871. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University.

46 Lyon Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, Charlottesville, 11 March 1872. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
struck Julia with such force that she did not believe that she would ever recover.

Refocusing her life was not easy. There had been too many family deaths, and each one seemed more painful. Except for Juliana, each family member had died quickly and suddenly. First the explosion on board the *Princeton* had taken her father, then Alexander and Margaret both died after short, unexpected illnesses. Although he was old and in failing health, John Tyler’s death had also come without warning. Each death seemed to draw Julia closer to religion as she searched for comfort. With each of the earlier losses, she had turned to prayer as a means of getting beyond her grief. Once again, Julia sought consolation through prayer, but she did not have a strong identity with a church. During her marriage she had been a marginal Episcopalian, but now she began making inquiries about Roman Catholicism.

Julia had easy access to the Catholic Church after moving to Washington, D. C., in 1871, since she had enrolled both Fitzwalter and Pearlie in Catholic institutions. Julie’s brief school experience at the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Halifax probably inspired Julia’s decision. In any case, with children at Georgetown College and Georgetown Academy of the Visitation Julia was able to get to know the priests and nuns who staffed those schools. One of the first priests Julia met at Georgetown was Patrick Francis Healy, a philosophy professor who became the dean of studies in the early 1870s. In 1873, he became acting president of the college, and the Jesuits confirmed him as the twenty-ninth
president of college in 1874.\textsuperscript{47} Father Healy developed a close friendship with Julia, and whenever she traveled outside of the city, he corresponded with her. A kind and gentle man, Healy was one of four fair-skinned mulatto sons of a Georgia slave, and he was very different from other people Julia had befriended during her lifetime. She had always been careful to consider her friends' family origins, but she never mentioned Father Healy's background in any of her correspondence. While it is reasonable to expect that she asked him about his family, it is equally reasonable to assume that the mixed-race Jesuit told her the truth about his heritage.

Born in Georgia to an Irish planter and his mulatto slave mistress, Patrick Healy was the second of five children whom his father, Michael, took north in order to protect them from inheriting the status of their mother. By carefully providing for their education, he enabled three of his sons to launch impressive careers in the Catholic Church. Healy's oldest son, James, became the first bishop of Portland, Maine in 1875. Another son, Alexander, was also ordained and served as a theologian for the Diocese of Boston. Father Patrick Healy was the first son of an American slave to earn a Ph.D.\textsuperscript{48}

Healy's religious instructions to Julia embraced a number of themes ranging


from the inevitability of death to love of neighbor. In 1872, he wrote, "What delights me in your letter is the cheerfulness with which you take up the cross that a loving God puts upon you and the earnestness with which you seek to do good to all who come within your sphere. To disdain people of prejudice is the first step toward inculcating sound principles. May our good God bless your efforts with success." The struggle against prejudice was not easy for a woman who was acutely aware of her own position amidst the divisions of class and race in American society, but she was willing to accept the concept that prejudice was wrong. During the months and years ahead, she made progress by at least softening her views about those people she had previously regarded as political enemies. A good indication of Julia's evolution was her attempt to put sectional politics and the war behind her. In 1872 while in the process of religious conversion, she made a cordial visit to the White House and had tea with President and Mrs. Grant. When her son Lonie read about the visit in the newspaper, he indignantly wrote, "What a surprise it must have been to old Grant &c to be done the honor of a call by Mrs. John Tyler! I shouldn't think your pride would have allowed you! You, who were always talking about the people on S.I. [Staten Island] as nobodies visiting such a nobody as Grant, though he is President." Lonie was slow to realize that his mother had decided to back away from her old class and political prejudices.

49 Patrick Francis Healy, S.J. to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 8 August 1872. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University.

50 Lyon Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, Charlottesville, 11 March 1872. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
Father Healy and his Jesuit superiors recognized the importance of winning a convert as prominent as Julia during a period when many Americans harbored strong prejudices against the Roman Catholic Church. But they did not attempt to evangelize her, nor were they willing to bend church doctrines in order to accomplish Julia’s conversion. She was the one who sought structure and new meaning for her life and found the rigid legalism of Catholicism particularly appealing. The church required Julia to respond to a written interrogation of her religious views before the rites of initiation, and she carefully numbered her responses to a list of eighteen questions which were not preserved. Her answers indicate a genuine commitment to Catholic doctrines and moral teachings, but Julia was no zealot. "I do recognize the necessity of repentance," she wrote, "and my determination is . . . to make Jesus Christ my example in all things and thus to fulfill the end and object of my existence and render myself a faithful votary of my Creator." But she was unwilling to sacrifice those things in life that brought her joy and were not inherently evil. In response to one question, she wrote:

I do not think that I am bound to lead the life of an ascetic. There is nothing in a good play or opera criminal in itself. On the contrary, some of them constitute the highest evidence of genius of taste and of moral[s]. Like everything else they are liable to abuse. So of music and the dance [and] all amusements of life, all the good gifts of Providence may be abused. Use but do not abuse would seem to me to be a sound maxim, which conflicts not with but is recommended by the Christian precepts.

Indeed Julia would continue to make use of many of life’s pleasures, but she would do so as a devout Christian. Convinced that God did not require her to stop enjoying music and other forms of entertainment because she had converted, she added:
I have participated in balls, and should most probably do so again upon suitable occasions, but even in the midst of the dance I should not forget my obligations to my maker but should have rather new cause of gratitude to him that he should have constituted one as to have made me susceptible of pleasurable emotions to be enjoyed rationally and without offence to him. I cannot bring myself to believe that he can even be offended in the happiness of his creations or that he requires them to live in gloom and solitude.  

Julia realized that religious conversion is an interior change which involves faith and a new attitude about morality. There was no reason for her to deprive herself of a good party, and she knew that.

Julia officially entered the church in May, 1872. Since initiation into the Roman Catholic Church requires a sponsor or "godparent," she requested Father Healy to serve in that capacity. Deeply touched by this new dimension of their relationship, he wrote, "My dear God-child, I like this name better than any other for it indicates a closer relation than friend. The tie is heaven-made and its obligations cannot be severed by any of the vicissitudes that overshadow the affairs of us poor mortals." In this capacity Father Healy did everything he could to console, advise, and assist Julia with decisions and problems. When Julia attempted to sell Villa Margaret in 1874, she asked him if the Jesuits might be interested in purchasing her property. His response was encouraging. "It is not impossible, Healy wrote. "Can you inform me how much it is worth? If the price comes within the reach of our money bag, I shall write at once to Father

---

51Julia Gardiner Tyler's responses to a Church inquiry about her faith, undated and unsigned. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

52Patrick Francis Healy, S.J. to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 8 January 1874. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University.
Provincial and see what action he may take about it.\textsuperscript{53} The Jesuits did not purchase the property, but that did not prevent Julia from later urging Healy to ask his superiors to purchase her estate on Staten Island.\textsuperscript{54}

Julia's friendship with Father Healy continued throughout the 1870s, but his name ultimately disappeared from her correspondence.\textsuperscript{55} Although busy with his academic responsibilities, he always responded to her letters promptly. When he could not, Healy apologized.\textsuperscript{56} When Julia had difficulty paying Fitzwalter's tuition at Georgetown, Father Healy notified her that the Jesuits "cheerfully assent to your request with regard to the payment of bills. I will advise the treasurer of the arrangement on his return."\textsuperscript{57} In 1877 he wrote, "We have begun a new year [and] I want it to be a very happy one for all my dear friends, especially for all those to whom I am bound by holy, spiritual ties. I may wish God only one grant. To Him I shall go next Thursday to the altar to ask a copious blessing

\textsuperscript{53}Patrick Francis Healy, S. J. to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 1 May 1875. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University.

\textsuperscript{54}Patrick Francis Healy, S. J. to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 9 April 1877. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University.

\textsuperscript{55}Father Patrick Healy's personal papers are in the archives of the College of the Holy Cross. I have not examined any of his private papers and have limited my study of the priest to secondary sources.

\textsuperscript{56}Patrick Francis Healy, S. J. to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 20 April 1875. Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University.

\textsuperscript{57}Patrick Francis Healy, S. J. to Julia Gardiner Tyler, nd. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
upon you and your dear family." Healy's consistent kindness and loyal friendship were important to Julia during a very difficult and unsettling period of her life. She had turned to God after suffering tragic losses of her loved ones and found a friend in the process.

But conversion to Roman Catholicism created new problems for Julia. Except for Fitzwalter and Pearlie, her children were extremely unhappy with their mother's new faith. Like her sister Julie, Pearlie enjoyed attending a Catholic boarding school, and she followed her mother into the church. Gardie quickly notified Julia of his surprise but guaranteed her that he would not put up an argument because he had neither "Luther [n]or Loyola" in his composition. He did, however, express doubt about her new convictions:

My dear Mother, (I hope you won't think me irreverent) I have some curiosity to see what sort of a Catholic you will make. All those I have yet seen are so supremely complacent about their dogmas that I could find no other name for their state of mind but bigotry. You who have never taken half views of men and things must be strangely metamorphosed. You threaten to convince me. That is an utter impossibility. If I am ever to be a Christian the Church of my fathers will fully satisfy everything I may think necessary as outward signs of such a belief.59

Newspaper reports and local gossip in Charles City County about his mother's conversion stunned Gardie, but he was more curious about her motives than angry. He was, however, unwilling to offer her any encouragement or reassurance. Yet his reaction to Julia's conversion was milder than that of his brother Lonie

---


who wrote:

Well done! What must happen next? Now that Horace Greeley has changed from a Radical of the bloodiest die to a liberal Republican—from an inveterate and brutal enemy to the South to its pretended champion, etc. & now that Mrs. Ex-President Tyler has changed from Episcopal—from the Protestant church, the church of her fathers to the Roman Catholic, the relentless and persecuting enemy in former times of her national church! And pray for what reason have you taken this course? Because "there is unity and system in it," you say. Fine unity and system indeed! If you consider that there is a true unity and system in superstitious beliefs.60

Julia was too happy with her new faith to permit her children to interfere, and she did not worry about friends who did not understand, although there were many in Charles City County. In his anger, Lonie cut to the heart of the matter when he noted "the mass of Roman Catholics" belonged to a "low [social] order, composed of the ignorant & from their ignorance are superstitious." He knew that nineteenth-century American Catholics were mostly poor immigrants who had few skills. During the Civil War, Lonie was probably aware that his grandmother blamed the Irish for every problem in New York City, and his mother had been no different. Before her conversion, the class-conscious Julia would have been uncomfortable with the vast majority of American Catholics. Lonie must have known that, but he refused to acknowledge that she had experienced a profound change.

Unfortunately, Julia did not live in an environment which permitted her to make a deeply personal decision like religious conversion without publicity and criticism. In the past, newspaper publicity had delighted her. Now the papers...

60 Lyon Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 16 May 1872. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
focused on her religious choice and were still circulating stories about Julia's religious fervor six years later. Unfortunately, some of the information was patently untrue:

AN ERROR. A paragraph has recently been going the rounds of the press to the effect that President Tyler's widow has become an inmate of a convent in Georgetown, D.C. We are informed by Rev. Dr. Eaton who last evening returned from a visit to Charles City County, where he delivered a lecture for the benefit of a Baptist Church, that on his way to the landing he called yesterday morning at the Old Tyler Mansion, where he was courteously received and hospitably entertained by Mrs. Tyler.61

Julia's numerous family responsibilities made joining a convent an unlikely possibility. Although Pearlie was a grown woman when this rumor started, Julia still had the primary responsibility for rearing Julie's daughter Baby.

One of Julia's most difficult problems during the postwar years was her role as guardian to her nephew, Harry Beeckman. She loved him as dearly as she loved her own children, but he did not possess the same discipline or academic promise as his cousins. Since Harry was a beneficiary of his grandmother's estate, Julia did not have to worry about finding money to meet his bills. He loved his aunt, and initially their relationship was very strong. Harry also enjoyed Virginia and was happy to attend Washington College with Gardie in 1868. Initially, his progress was impressive. In Germany, he had demonstrated a weakness for alcoholic drink, but Gardie reported that Harry's "morals have been irreprouachable since his advent here, [and] to my certain knowledge, he had not

61*Index-Appeal* (Petersburg, Virginia), 28 April 1880, 4.
touched a drop of anything stronger than Adam's Ale since he left New York."

Harry only enrolled in three courses during the fall of 1868, and his highest average was in mathematics. While he had an 80 average in the highest level of French, his average in Chemistry was 74.5. Although Harry's grades were not impressive, he was passing. Then almost without warning, he withdrew from college in 1869 and moved to Sherwood Forest. At twenty-one years of age he was still in need of parental guidance, and Julia did not know how to help him.

Before leaving Washington College, he wrote her a letter seeking direction. Dismayed to learn that Julia was toying with the idea of renting Sherwood Forest out rather than returning to Virginia, he noted each of his cousins' future plans and inquired about her intentions for him:

[I] have not asked Gardie his intentions, but have thought all along that after taking his diploma as B.L. he was going to read Law in some lawyer's office in Richmond. Lach says he is going into business, but where is he going to "hang out" at [sic]? Lyon is coming to Washington College [actually the University of Virginia]. What is he going to do during the summers? Fitz and Pearlie you will of course take along with you. Jul[ie] gets married and someone else takes charge of her; Alex, where will he stow himself? & then comes H.G.B. [Harry]. What are you going to do with him? In what way will it please you to dispose of him? Now, there's a general smash up of all your forces for you; now how do you intend to collect the scattered flock together again? Will you be kind enough to answer these interrogations in your next letter?

---


64Seager, 536.

Having lost his parents at an early age, Harry now longed to be a part of a strong family structure.

At first Gardie tried to help by spending as much time as possible with Harry, but he needed more love and companionship than a cousin could provide. Shortly after Harry moved to Sherwood Forest, he wrote Julia that Gardie had spent the day with him, and he had "persuaded him to stay . . . another week and had I my own say so, he should stay till you made your appearance." Like her children, Harry complained because Julia had not written in over two weeks. He apparently made a decision to spend the rest of his life in Charles City County and wanted to purchase land there. Part of his anxiety about receiving a letter from Julia stemmed from his determination to buy a farm that would be available for sale by February 11, 1869. He believed the owners would ask about $8000 for the farm, and he needed her to make arrangements for him to have access to that amount plus $2000 for mules and equipment.66

Since Harry did not save most of the letters, Julia's reaction to his farming plans is not known. He was, however, still in residence at Sherwood Forest in November 1869 and at that time still hoped to purchase a farm. This time "a portion of the Douthat estate" was available for sale at auction, and he had "spoken to Mr. Clopton & others and they say that it is a most desirable farm & is the most productive estate in the county." John C. Tyler agreed and advised "that if I wish to buy at all I had better buy before the expected sale comes off." The

66Henry Gardiner Beeckman to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 3 January 1869. Tyler Family Papers. Yale University.
estate consisted of a house and four hundred riverside acres enclosed by a fence of cypruss posts and rails. This time he only sought Julia's opinion.  

Harry never became a farmer, but he was a bona fide alcoholic by 1875. Concerned and dismayed by his dissipation, Julia sent a stern letter which she hoped would serve as "one more effort to see if I can by placing your position before you, rescue you from the depths of moral degradation into which you have been casting yourself for so long a time." Unaware of any other approach to take, Julia appealed to his sense of guilt when she wrote, "Your mother was worthy of the best of sons & how is it that her only child upon whom she wasted so much love & care should only prove to be a disgrace to be something I cannot comprehend." Insisting that he would have been better off had he been born an "idiot," dependent on the care of friends the remainder of his life, Julia attributed his dissolute living to the wealth his grandmother had provided. There was nothing positive in Julia's angry letter:

Disgrace and want is your certain future here & punishment beyond even your worst idea will be yours hereafter if after the warning you receive you persevere in your disgusting life. I . . . think of your mother, my loved and loving sister Margaret, so lovely & brilliant until it seems to me she tries to urge me to say to you even more than I have done & not to desist as I had determined to do. Instead of being the thoughtful, sensible man doing your duty to the memory of your parents as their only representative on earth, adding to the store that was so fortunately provided, taking the stand of a respectable, industrious, useful citizen in the community in which you live, bring no blush of mortification to the cheek of your nearest relatives. What are you? The word of contempt in all the county! There is not one so low in all the county who would not insult & cast you from their door if you did not still have a little money left with which they see they can be repaid for the whiskey you drink with them. You make yourself the boon companion

---

of negroes as well as the lowest white people & both classes regard you with scornful wonder. How strange it is that Mrs. Tyler should have such a nephew as Harry Beeckman, I presume is often said by black & white.\textsuperscript{68}

In her disgust with Harry, Julia forgot her Christian resolve to refrain from the prejudices of the past. She regarded Harry's behavior as both a disappointment and an embarrassment. Julia was upset because she did not know how to help him. In 1874, she moved back to Sherwood Forest and tried to influence Harry, but there was nothing she could do. He died in August 1875 after riding into a low branch while returning home to Sherwood Forest on his horse.\textsuperscript{69} Harry had been drinking and may have been sufficiently intoxicated to have died without feeling much pain. Julia was grief-stricken, but it is unlikely that had he lived, his behavior would have changed. Harry's death caused almost as much pain as Julie's had. Julia felt special responsibility for him because he was her sister's child, and she had failed to do anything to help him. He needed love and moral support, and Julia had offered very little of either. Harry's psychological crisis and death came at a time when she was most preoccupied with financial problems. Concern about bills had distracted Julia, and she had not given him as much attention as she gave her own children.

As early as 1869, Julia had begun investigating the possibility that the government owed funds to her late husband. Aided by Attorney General William M. Evarts, who was an old friend, she pushed to obtain a copy of the patent on

\textsuperscript{68}Julia Gardiner Tyler to Harry Beeckman, n.d. 1875. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

\textsuperscript{69}Seager, 544.
land issued to John Tyler by the federal government as compensation for his
service in the War of 1812. The original patent had burned along with other Tyler
possessions stored in Richmond during the Civil War. An 1855 law entitled "An
Act in addition to certain Acts granting Bounty Land to certain Officers and
Soldiers who have been engaged in the Military Service of the United States," had
awarded John Tyler 160 acres of land in Iowa.\(^\text{70}\) Since the law had provided for
the ownership of the land by soldiers and their heirs, Julia had no difficulty laying
claim to the property. Securing a new deed to this land was only the beginning of
a crusade to accrue benefits related to her husband's government service.

In 1878, Lonie notified Julia about a pension for veterans of the War of
1812 and suggested that she might be eligible to a claim. "It provides for the
widows of any volunteers or militiamen of the War of 1812 that served for 12 days,
and provides too the land warrant such soldier received for services in such war
shall be evidence of his service." He urged his mother to claim the "pension of $8
a month and if you don't care for such pittance, pass it over to me."\(^\text{71}\) Congress
had actually enacted the statute in 1862, and Julia pressed for retroactive pay.
The federal government was not that generous, but she did begin receiving the
modest pension in 1879.\(^\text{72}\) Eight dollars per month was hardly enough to solve

\(^{70}\) Secretary of Interior, O. H. Browning to Attorney General William M. Evarts,
Washington, 23 February 1869; Copy of government patent and certification by
Joseph S. Wilson, Commissioner of the General Land Office of the Department of
the Interior. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

\(^{71}\) Lyon Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, Williamsburg, 13 March 1878.
Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

\(^{72}\) Seager, 547.
Julia's financial problems, but she was happy to take whatever she could get.

More important, the success of this application for John Tyler's pension emboldened her to begin a campaign to obtain a much larger pension in her own name.

Again depending heavily on the advice of William M. Evarts, Julia began to push for the establishment a widow's pension for all surviving First Ladies, after the Congress created such a provision for Mary Todd Lincoln in 1870 by awarding her $3000 annually. The other survivors were Sarah Childress Polk and Caroline Fillmore. Although confident of success, Julia withdrew her petition on the advice of political friends. Virginia Democratic Representative John Goode, for one, did not think the economic and political realities of the mid-1870s would permit Congress to favor her petition. After deciding upon a temporary delay, she replied, "my chief hope [is] that Congress will feel a President's widow should not petition in vain!" She tried again in 1879, and once again looked to Evarts, who was now Secretary of State, for advice. Her son Lonie formulated a second petition and encouraged his mother to work hard to get this one approved:

I really believe you will succeed, for I don't think Congress would have the face to refuse. If you propose to petition take the step firmly and openly and advisedly and don't back down as you did before. Just think what a nice little pension of $3000 would do for you! To let the widow of a President petition in vain when so many hundreds have succeeded and are now living comfortably on a fat little income at the public expense would

---

be a shame.74

When the issue reached Congress that year, the political atmosphere in Washington was distinctly more conservative than it had been earlier in the decade. Rutherford B. Hayes was president, and Evarts was Secretary of State. Julia selected two conservative Virginia Democrats, Senator John W. Johnston and Representative J. Randolph Tucker, to support the passage of the measure. Uncertain that either man was really interested in her cause, she confided to Lyon that she regarded both men as "awful old foggies," and added, "I selected these two to act for me because I could hardly do otherwise as they were the ones who represent Virginia. I really think I could have obtained a greater interest from some others though I hope it may not prove so." Reluctant to sponsor the measure himself, Johnston believed the widow's pension bill was more likely to pass if offered by a Republican. He did, however, informally discuss the measure with Republican senators and later reported their approval to Julia.75

Although Julia lobbied any Congressman or journalist she could keep still long enough to read one of her letters or to listen to her argument that she should be treated as an equal to Mary Todd Lincoln, Congress did not make the widow's pension a priority.76 When the bill finally came to a vote in 1881, the amount of the pension was set at $1200 per annum. During the next several months,

74Lyon Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, Memphis, 6 March 1879. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

75Julia Gardiner Tyler to Lyon Gardiner Tyler, Sherwood Forest, 26 January 1882. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

76Seager, 547-548.
however, Julia continued to argue that the other widows should receive as much as Mrs. Lincoln. The editor of the Charlottesville, Virginia, newspaper *The Jeffersonian* agreed and sent a copy of an editorial he had written to Sherwood Forest. Convinced that Senator Johnston needed to see the editorial more than she did, Julia forwarded the article to him. The editor argued that Congress "needed to provide suitably for them [presidential widows]." During Julia’s push for a larger stipend, Caroline Fillmore died, and Lucretia Randolph Garfield joined the ranks of widowed First Ladies. In February 1882, Julia wrote:

> You may depend on it, dear Lach[lan], I am impatient for the action of the Senate. They are so slow in reaching my bill on the calendar. The action in the House I consider very favorable. It will spur on the Senate & Mr. Atkins of Tennessee indicates the animus of the House, so I don’t trouble myself about the result. They say in Rich[mond] I have it sure, but I cannot arrange the future yet, so only think of my $3000 due in March & what I have to pay out of it & what I will have left to pay for a visit to Washington on.

The assassination of James Garfield contributed to the passage of the bill. National mourning translated into widespread Congressional sympathy for Mrs. Garfield. But when legislators decided on a pension stipend, they could not easily discriminate between Lucretia Garfield and the other two presidential widows. Congress awarded all three of them stipends of $3000 per year, but that was not enough to please Julia. She argued, "They ought to go back to the deaths of our

---

77Julia Gardiner Tyler to Lyon Gardiner Tyler, Sherwood Forest, 8 February 1882. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

husbands for Mrs. P[olk] and me."79 Julia’s persistence paid off. In late April, Senator Johnston wrote to inform her that the bill to increase her pension had passed. "Your name will be placed on the roles at the rate of $5000 a year and you will be paid hereafter just as you have been heretofore."80 But this did not end her complaints. Four days after receiving Johnston’s letter, she wanted Lachlan to "ask the Commission . . . if my pension can be made available at once, as I am needing money for a trip to some watering place for my health."

Additionally, she sought to make the government checks more convenient. "Enquire . . . also if it cannot be arranged that I can have my pension sent direct from the Treasury to Riggs Bank to my credit? It is so far and takes such a time to obtain it from Knoxville."81 Despite her complaints, the pension did provide badly needed financial security upon which she could depend for the remainder of her life.

When the pensions began in 1882, all of Julia’s children had completed their formal education, but the money was still a welcome resource. The success of the lobbying effort was also a tribute to her persuasive skills. Whether Julia possessed real political skill or simply wore people down by her persistence is unclear. In any case, she managed to get her way. When she began lobbying in 1878, her son Lonie also encouraged her to help the College of William and Mary

79Ibid.


81Julia Gardiner Tyler to Lachlan Tyler, Sherwood Forest, 29 April 1882. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
in its campaign to secure federal indemnification for Civil War damage to the campus. In 1877 he had accepted an appointment at the college as professor of belles lettres, but he knew that his continued employment depended upon an infusion of aid to the poverty-stricken institution. Apparently, Julia did take up the college's cause, for when she left the capital, Lonie wrote:

I am sorry you can't stay in Washington to see the bill through & when I say I am sorry, I echo the sentiments of all those I have spoke with on the subject of your efforts in behalf of the college. Col. [Benjamin] Ewell [President of the College] says your influence there would be worth that of any six men, which is a compliment, you know.82

Whether Julia really garnered any support or Col. Ewell was simply being gallant, the outcome was the same for the college. No bill passed, and in 1878 Lonie left to teach in a private high school in Memphis.

By the time her lobbying efforts had ended in 1882, Julia's life had changed. She had suffered several bouts of malaria and was no longer willing to take the risk of living in the unhealthy environment of Charles City County. Richmond offered a healthier climate and the option of living near a Catholic church. Her son Lonie also influenced her decision to move to Richmond. During the late 1870s, he had operated a secondary school in Memphis, but the city was too impoverished to support a Tyler in the style to which he aspired.83 Now he hoped to move back to Richmond to practice law and write the history of his father's presidency. A central part of his plan entailed living with Julia. Since

82 Lyon Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 13 March 1878, Williamsburg, Virginia. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

83 Lyon Gardiner Tyler to Fitzwalter Tyler, 6 October 1879, Memphis. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
he had married Annie Baker Tucker in 1878, the house needed to be large enough to accommodate his wife, Julia's granddaughter Baby, and two servants. He promised to share expenses with his mother but clearly hoped she would assume most of the financial responsibility. Lonie estimated the household expenses at approximately $120 per month:

I would get a house on Clay or Marshall Street... and wouldn't give a snap of my finger for Franklin & Grace, the abode of the "Shoddies" & the rich. Don't you see your station is assured no matter where you live? I am confident that a real nice house could be got for $40.00 per month. This would leave $80.00 for household expenses, counting the $20.00 which I will "pony up," like a little man.84

Julia rented a house in the Church Hill section of the city in 1882 and moved away from Sherwood Forest permanently.

Confident that his mother's influence would insure his career as a Richmond attorney and that the publication of the Tyler history would guarantee his own prominence, Lonie only needed Julia to set up housekeeping in Richmond and provide $300 to cover his move from Memphis.85 With the pensions beginning in 1882, Julia assumed the support of Lonie and Annie, while he attempted to begin a law practice and a book. Financially, the decision was unwise. Julia still had outstanding debts, but she decided to comply with Lonie's wishes anyhow. After more than a dozen years of indebtedness, she still was unable to make decisions based on her own economic limitations. Aiding her son with the writing and publication of a book that gave a favorable interpretation of

84Lyon Gardiner Tyler to Julia Gardiner Tyler, 22 October 1881, Memphis. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.

85Ibid.
the Tyler presidency was more important to Julia than financial considerations.

Julia believed that Lonie's book would forever silence the critics of John Tyler, and she was anxious to steer him in the direction of people who had been loyal to her husband during his public career. But the project may have been more than she bargained for. Lonie's original plan was to write a memoir that was an edited version of Tyler's letters and speeches, but he quickly lost his focus. The scope of the project actually ranged far beyond the Tyler presidency and provided genealogy as well as the history of family leadership in colonial Virginia. It was an ambitious undertaking for a man who simultaneously hoped to begin a law practice. By the time he had completed his work, the manuscript was three volumes long.

Lonie relied heavily on his own research skills for the colonial family history that filled most of the first volume, but he turned to Julia for aid with the second volume and found her help invaluable. Since most of John Tyler's presidential papers had burned during the fall of Richmond, Julia was able to suggest names of political allies, friends, and family members who might have retained letters he had written them:

Have you written to R.M.T.W. & Gov. Letcher & you would find I expect many interesting letters in the possession of the Graham family in New York. John Lorimer Graham was his Postmaster in New York & a very confidential friend. Have you written Winthrop in Boston? I think he had some correspondence with your Father near about the time of the war. Have you asked anything from Mr. [James] Lyons? Do you intend to ask anything from Priscilla [Cooper Tyler]. Your father wrote on politics as well as family matters to them.86

---

After a lifetime of defending her husband's presidency, nothing pleased Julia more than playing a role in the production of a major history book designed to thwart Tyler's critics. And much to her satisfaction, Lonie had become an aggressive defender of his father's legacy.

Published little more than a decade before the advent of modern historical scholarship as *The Letters and Times of the Tylers*, Lonie's project is a fine example of patrician history. Although the narrative is neither objective nor critical, the volumes include many letters that cannot be found in archival collections. The lack of objectivity is not surprising given the purpose of the work. When Julia paid Whittet & Shepperson of Richmond for publication of Lonie's book, she paid for her son's right to express the family's views about John Tyler's place in American history. *The Letters and Times of the Tylers* brought Julia a great deal of personal satisfaction, but the price was high. Although the cost of publication cannot be ascertained, Julia was still deeply in debt to the publishers in 1889, the year of her death. "In regard to Whittet & Shepperson, in September I will commence & make payments," she assured Lonie. "I will commence with $100 a quarter."88

Publication of *The Letters and Times of the Tylers* helped her son launch his own career as historian and scholar. Since John Tyler enjoyed distinction among southerners for his commitment to states' rights, many Virginians were highly

---

87The first two volumes of *The Letters and Times of the Tylers* were published in 1884. Julia was no longer alive when Lyon published the third volume in 1894.

88Julia Gardiner Tyler to Lyon Gardiner Tyler, Madison, Virginia, [?] April 1889. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
complimentary of these books. After their publication, Lonie served briefly in the Virginia General Assembly before accepting an appointment to the presidency of the College of William & Mary in 1888. His prediction had been correct. Julia's influence and the publication of the books had launched his career.  

Julia was also eager to promote the careers of her other children. No one loved Sherwood Forest more than Gardie who was able to assume full responsibility for the plantation when his mother moved to Richmond. Aside from becoming a gentleman planter, he practiced law and aspired to public office. The combination of postwar politics and black voters prevented his election to public office in Virginia, but Julia remained hopeful. In 1885 she wrote President Grover Cleveland, requesting a position for Gardie as Attorney to the United States District Court of the Custom District of Virginia. "My son has not the least idea that his mother . . . has determined to ask for this office as a favor to her, at the President's hands." None of her efforts to obtain political appointment for Gardie paid off. She did, however, witness the growth of his law practice and the slow revival of Sherwood Forest under his management.

When Alex was unsuccessful in finding employment between 1877 and 1879, Julia helped him obtain a patronage job as a surveyor. She provided $4000 he needed to cover his initial expenses in a project which entailed surveying Indian lands in the Dakota Territory. On September 1, 1883, the venture ended in

89Lonie continued writing history books throughout has long career at the College of William and Mary, where he served as president from 1888 to 1919.

90Julia Gardiner Tyler to Grover Cleveland, 2 February 1885, Richmond, Virginia. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
tragedy. More than two months later, a physician in Santa Fe apprised Julia of the details of her son's death. Alex had contracted a severe form of diarrhea "while traveling over the Alkali desert" in New Mexico. Because he was unable to retain either food or medicine for any length of time, the doctor had been unable to treat him or to "administer proper nourishment." After two or three days, "he died of the exhaustion consequent on this protracted diarrhoea and vomiting." 91

Alex's wife (and third cousin) Sally Gardiner buried him with the Gardiner family in East Hampton, New York. Although it is not clear why, Julia was unable to make the trip to the funeral. After she and Pearl sent flowers and a wreath, they anxiously awaited details of the service. Perhaps Julia did not need to be there because she had seen so many other family funerals at the oceanside cemetery. Alex's grave was just a few feet away from the graves of her parents. She had been through the painful ritual many times before, but the grief was especially devastating when she had to bury one of her children. Gardie represented his mother at the funeral, but there was little that he or anyone could do to comfort her. She was resilient, and once again only time would ease her pain. In the meantime, she focused on her other children and Baby Spencer.

After 1884, Julia had begun spending most of her time with her daughter Pearl and son-in-law William Mumford Ellis in Madison near Roanoke, Virginia, although she continued to maintain a residence in Richmond. Giving indebtedness as the reason, she "broke off housekeeping" and hoped to pay off debts.

---

91 W. S. Harroun, M.D to Julia Gardiner Tyler, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 23 November 1883. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
her debts. At this point, Gardie and Lonie assumed responsibility for directing her finances, and this arrangement was not always pleasant. When she made plans to visit her son Lachlan in Ashland where he had purchased a farm, he advised her not to come. Indignantly, she reported his letter to Gardie:

Lachlan wrote me that you & Lonie were adverse to my visit to him on account of my affairs and would say nothing to induce me to go against [any] of your wishes or views. Now as my whole object was to introduce him a little, & make him known by being on a visit to him . . . I did not propose to spend any extra money and would have made my wardrobe . . . if I could have been of use to him by doing so.

Because of their stern approach to Julia's finances, she obediently relinquished her pension checks to Lonie. He paid the bills and doled out a small allowance for her use. After forwarding one check, she advised him on part of its use:

You must send [payment] to Lord & Taylor for they are very true friends. Lachlan wrote me you were going to send him $150 if, you said, "I did not interfere and you trusted I would not." Of course I will not, I am only too glad to be of relief to the poor fellow. Send me by return mail what you propose for me.

Sometimes Gardie and Lonie were so zealous about stretching their mother's funds that she was without spending money. "I haven't a cent left in my purse even to buy postage stamps," she wrote after bills had been paid in March 1889, "so please send me some stamps. And when June comes and I start for Washington please gather up a little money before then to pay my way & either


94Julia Gardiner Tyler to Lyon Gardiner Tyler, 6 March 1886, Madison, Virginia. Tyler Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
you or Lonie must go to Washington to meet me & help me in my business when
the time comes."95

As they attempted to manage Julia's affairs, Gardie and Lonie were
sometimes insensitive to their mother. Neither son appeared to understand that
she had been as generous to them as possible. Both were partly to blame for her
indebtedness, but now they treated her like an extravagant old lady who had
lacked the ability to budget her own funds. Uncharacteristically, Julia failed to
resist her sons' stern treatment. The new generation of men who had taken
charge of her life were different from their grandfather David Gardiner, their
father John Tyler, or their uncle Alexander. The older generation had always
treated Julia like a queen, and each had attempted to insure that she had ample
money for her enjoyment. But Gardie and Lonie lived with a different set of
realities. The postwar southern economy did not permit Julia to live lavishly, and
her sons did not want Sherwood Forest encumbered by debts that she could not
pay off while she was alive. As a result, Lonie judiciously governed the widow's
pension and applied as much as possible to his mother's unpaid bills including that
owed to the Richmond publishers Whittet & Shepperson.

Fortunately, Julia did not have to live under these constraints for long.
Although still an energetic woman in 1889, she was now sixty-five years of age and
no longer able to cope with illnesses as well as she had done in the past. Her
chief complaint was severe pain in an arm which she had fractured several years

95Julia Gardiner Tyler to Lyon Gardiner Tyler, Madison, 28 March 1889. Tyler
Family Papers. College of William & Mary.
earlier, but malaria was a much more dangerous health problem. She suffered at least one serious bout with malaria during the 1880s, and Gardie and Pearlie hoped their mother could avoid another attack. Since Julia associated malaria with Sherwood Forest, she was careful to avoid visiting the plantation during warm weather. When she was not in Madison, Julia was relatively comfortable in Richmond where seventeen-year old Baby Spencer did everything she could to make her grandmother comfortable. Time spent in the city afforded close proximity to a Catholic church, and that was important because Julia's religious zeal had not diminished after her conversion. In Richmond, she could also attend occasional political speeches or dine with prominent acquaintances who had ties to state government.

Julia's final illness occurred in early July 1889. She had just attended the commencement exercises at the College of William & Mary to see Lonie preside for the first time, and Gardie had hoped to take her to Sherwood Forest for a brief visit afterwards but realized she would probably decline because of the malaria season. Afraid to take the risk, Julia and Baby Spencer returned to Richmond on July 7 and took lodging at the Exchange Hotel because their own house was much too hot after having been closed up for several days. The day after their return, she had hoped to consult with Dr. Hunter McGuire about the pain in her arm, but that turned out to be the least of her problems. When she

96 David Gardiner Tyler to Pearl Tyler Ellis, Sherwood Forest, 28 June 1886. Tyler Family Papers. Virginia Historical Society.

97 David Gardiner Tyler to Pearl Tyler Ellis, Sherwood Forest, 30 June 1889. Tyler Family Papers. Virginia Historical Society.
was too ill to leave her bed the next day, Dr. McGuire examined her at the hotel. His diagnosis was a bilious attack and congestive chill. Julia may have suffered a stroke. She died during the late afternoon on July 10, after receiving Extreme Unction from a priest who had been summoned from the local cathedral to administer the sacrament.98

Two days later, prominent Richmond Protestants crowded into St. Peter's Cathedral for the funeral and watched as a priest in ornate vestments led them through the ancient Requiem Mass. Her bier rested between rows of tall candles, and he blessed it with copious amounts of holy water which symbolized her baptism. He blessed the bier a second time with incense. As thick, sweet scented smoke filled the cathedral, he intoned a litany of prayers which petitioned the Almighty to admit Julia into His company. The sacred rite was impressive, and Richmond's new Bishop-designate A. Van de Vyver wanted to make sure the majesty of the service was not lost on the visitors to his cathedral. Julia would have been pleased with the eloquence of his prayers and the dignity of the ritual. It was a ceremony fit for a head of state.99 After the funeral, the family buried her in Richmond's Hollywood Cemetery next to John Tyler and near other prominent men and women of Virginia.

98"Death of Mrs. Tyler," Richmond Times Dispatch, 11 July 1889; 12 July 1889; 13 July 1889.

99Richmond Times Dispatch, 12 January 1889.
Bibliography

Primary sources:


Gardiner Family Papers. Yale University Library.


Tyler Family Papers. Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

Tyler Collection. Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.


Secondary sources:

Books


Holloway, Laura C. *The Ladies of the White House; Or, In the Home of the Presidents.* Philadelphia, 1881.


Nickerson, Majorie L. *A Long Way Forward: The First Hundred Years of the Packer Collegiate Institute*. Brooklyn, N. Y.: The Packer Institute, 1945.


**Articles**


George, Margaret. "From 'Goodwife' to 'Mistress': The Transformation of the Female in Bourgeois Culture." *Science and Society* 37 (Summer 1973): 153-77.


Lyon, Ralph M. "The Early Years of Livingston Female Academy." *Alabama Historical Quarterly* (Fall 1975): 192-205.


"Will and Inventory of Honorable John Tyler," *William & Mary Quarterly*. XVII (April 1909)

**Newspapers**


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
"Did Miss Gardiner Indorse A Shop?" *New York Sun*. 27 June 1939.


"Marriage of the President of the United States." *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia) 27 June 1844.


"President Tyler and His Bride in Washington." *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia) 3 July 1844.


"The President's Bride." *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia) 29 June 1844.

"The President and His Bride." *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia) 1 July 1844.

**Pamphlets**

VITA

Theodore Carter DeLaney


In the fall of 1988, he entered the College of William & Mary, and completed course requirements for the M.A. degree in 1989, but not the thesis. After completing course requirements for the Ph.D. in 1991, the author taught American History at both Washington & Lee University and the State University of New York at Geneseo.