Collection Summary

Title: John Tyler Papers
Span Dates: 1691-1918
Bulk Dates: (bulk 1757-1918)
ID No.: MSS43489
Creator: Tyler, John, 1790-1862
Extent: 1,400 items ; 9 containers ; 1.8 linear feet ; 3 microfilm reels
Language: Collection material in English
Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
Summary: President of the United States, vice president under William Henry Harrison, and United States representative and senator from Virginia. Correspondence and other papers, including correspondence of Tyler's widow, Julia Gardiner Tyler, an autograph collection assembled by their son, Lyon Gardiner Tyler, and family papers reflecting social life and customs in Virginia.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

People
Bancroft, George, 1800-1891--Correspondence.
Barbour, James, 1775-1842--Correspondence.
Beeckman, Margaret Gardiner, 1822-1857--Correspondence.
Brown, Richard T.--Correspondence.
Buchanan, James, 1791-1868--Correspondence.
Cunningham, John S., active 1851-1856--Correspondence.
Curtis, Henry, 1792-1862--Correspondence.
Floyd, John B. (John Buchanan), 1806-1863--Correspondence.
Gardiner, Alexander, 1818-1851--Correspondence.
Gardiner, Juliana McLachlan, 1799-1864--Correspondence.
Gilmer, Thomas Walker, 1802-1844--Correspondence.
Grigsby, Hugh Blair, 1806-1881--Correspondence.
Harrison, William Henry, 1773-1841.
Jones, Mary Tyler, 1815-1848--Correspondence.
Kerr, John Leeds, 1780-1844--Correspondence.
Lyons, James, 1801-1882--Correspondence.
Monroe, James, 1758-1831--Correspondence.
Newton, Cincinnatus--Correspondence.
Page, John, 1787-1865--Correspondence.
Tazewell, Littleton Waller, 1774-1860--Correspondence.
Tucker, St. George, 1752-1827--Correspondence.
Tustin, Septimus--Correspondence.
Tyler family.
Tyler, John, 1790-1862.
Tyler, Julia Gardiner, 1820-1889. Julia Gardiner Tyler papers.
Tyler, Lyon Gardiner, 1853-1935. Lyon Gardiner Tyler papers.
Tyler, Robert, 1816-1877--Correspondence.
Wise, Henry A. (Henry Alexander), 1806-1876--Correspondence.

Subjects
Autographs--Collections.

Places
United States--Politics and government--1841-1845.
Administrative Information

Provenance

The papers of John Tyler, President of the United States, vice president under William Henry Harrison, and United States representative and senator from Virginia, were received through gift and purchase, 1903-1997.

Processing History

The John Tyler papers were arranged, indexed, and microfilmed in 1961. Subsequent additions were arranged and described in 1979 and 1997. In 2009 the finding aid was expanded by including description of the main collection from the published index.

Additional Guides

The microfilm edition of these papers (not including additions) is indexed in the John Tyler Papers (Washington: 1961), prepared as part of the President's Papers Index Series. The index is available online in PDF and page view versions.

Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of John Tyler is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The papers of John Tyler are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Microfilm

A microfilm edition of part of these papers is available on three reels. Consult reference staff in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase or interlibrary loan. To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the microfilm edition as available.

Online Content


Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container or reel number, John Tyler Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1790</td>
<td>Born, Greenway, Charles City County, Va.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>1807</td>
<td>Graduated, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va. Began study of law</td>
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<tr>
<td>1809</td>
<td>Admitted to the Virginia bar Began law practice in Charles City County, Va.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1811-1816</td>
<td>Elected to Virginia House of Delegates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1813</td>
<td>Married Letitia Christian (died 1842)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1815-1816</td>
<td>Member, Virginia executive council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1816-1821</td>
<td>Member, U.S. House of Representatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>1823-1825</td>
<td>Member, Virginia House of Delegates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1825-1827</td>
<td>Governor of Virginia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1827-1836</td>
<td>U.S. senator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Member, Virginia House of Delegates</td>
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<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Elected vice president of the United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>1841-1845</td>
<td>President of the United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>Expelled from the Whig party following veto of the bill to establish a national bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>Impeachment resolution introduced in the House of Representatives after veto of a tariff bill</td>
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<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td>Submitted treaty to annex the Republic of Texas; ratification failed in the Senate Married Julia Gardiner Failed to be nominated to succeed himself as president</td>
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<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>Signed joint resolution of the Congress admitting Texas to the Union as a slaveholding state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>Elected to the House of Representatives of the Confederate congress as member from Virginia but died before serving</td>
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<tr>
<td>1862, Jan. 18</td>
<td>Died, Richmond, Va.</td>
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**History of the Collection**


John Tyler valued highly the papers he accumulated in the course of his long career. In his will, drawn on October 10, 1859, he appointed his sons, Robert, John, Tazewell, and David, and his sons-in-law, James Semple and William Waller, to be his literary executors, "bequeathing to them for revision and publication if they shall think proper all such of my papers as relate to my own times and relate either to my own Biography or to public affairs." He went on to direct that "my collection of Autographs and all my private papers not relating to public affairs I give to my wife." [1] At the time he
directed this disposal of his papers, he could not foresee the calamities that were to befall them, shortly after his death, when the Civil War came to his home.

When the will was drawn, most of his papers were at "Sherwood Forest," a large plantation in Charles City County, Va., where he lived from the time he left the White House in March 1845 until his death on January 18, 1862. Shortly thereafter, the first of what were to be many Union contingents traversed the region. A number of these callers made their visits a matter of record. On June 13, 1864, Col. Mason W. Tyler wrote: [2]

. . . two or three of our staff mounted horses and went in search of the distinguished Virginian's home. The house was in charge of negro servants, who tried faithfully to keep watch and ward, but the soldiers soon invaded the premises, and upon being admitted into the rear, forced their way into the front of the house. It was a plain, comfortable habitation, on a slightly elevated plateau, surrounded by stately trees, with bookshelves and many books, and indications of literary work by its recent occupants. Some books were carried off by the soldiers, and not a few letters from prominent leaders in the Confederacy to the ex-President were discovered and appropriated. Aside from this I do not think much harm was done. The next day the place was protected by a guard.

On the following day, June 14, 1864, Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside's Ninth Army Corps was en route from Cold Harbor to the James River, In the corps was hospital steward Stephen Farnum Peckham of the 7th Regiment, Rhode Island Volunteers, who later reported: [3]

. . . passed along a road that led by the rear of the residence of ex-President John Tyler at 'Sherwood Forest,' Charles City County, Virginia. The beautiful location of the house on rising ground with an immense garden stretching down to the road, filled with roses and honeysuckle, led the writer and a friend to straggle from the command and visit the house. It was found to be deserted . . .

The house consisted of a central portion of two stories each of four large rooms separated by halls, in the form of a Greek cross. On either side of this central portion were wings of one story, consisting of a succession of rooms, each reached by passing through the other. . . . Those on the right were the library and private rooms of the master of the house. In the middle of the largest of these rooms was a cartload, more or less, of papers that had apparently been emptied from drawers as rubbish. This pile attracted my attention, and I was very soon absorbed in selecting letters and papers from historic personages.

Among other things, my eye fell on a package of yellow manifold paper that appeared to have been pressed hard together from having been carried in a pocket. It had a band of white paper pinned around it, on which was written, in the handwriting of President Tyler: 'Peace Convention.' We opened and examined the pieces of yellow paper, and found that they were copies of telegrams that had been sent President Tyler from all over the South, while he was the presiding officer of the 'Peace Convention,' giving him all sorts of information concerning the preparations that were being made to put the South in a condition to fight. A fort was being built in one place, guns were mounted in another, a company was being enlisted here, and a regiment there. The value of these telegrams, as compared with autograph letters with which we filled our pockets, did not occur to me until I had gone too far from the house to return with safety.

On getting into camp at the Ninth Corps Headquarters, where I was on duty, I immediately sought Colonel [Lewis] Richmond, General Burnside's Adjutant-General, and told him that the papers were in the house. He asked permission of the General to send me back with an escort to get them. General Burnside replied that he was extremely sorry that I had left them, but he would not authorize disobedience of his own orders. The examination of the 'Peace Convention' telegrams established beyond any possibility of doubt the fact that John Tyler, a man who had filled the exalted position of President of the United States, had run the 'Peace Convention' simply to kill time, while the South got ready to fight.

The papers that I did bring away were hastily looked over, tied in a bundle, and only lately carefully examined.
In the afternoon of the same day General Burnside and his staff stopped at Judge William H. Clopton's neighboring plantation. The General's private secretary, Capt. Daniel R. Larned, wrote to his sister: [4]

With her [Mrs. Clopton] was a Miss Tyler, niece of Ex President Tyler whose place (Sherwood) was just opposite . . . Miss Tyler was obliged to leave her house & seek shelter with Mrs C—because the negro troops under Genl Wild had Sacked the Mansion of 'Sherwood'—She begged that the General would make it his Head Qrs while he was in the vicinity—He promised to do so—but orders compelled us to move nearer the river—Some of us rode over to the place. . . . such a scene as the inside presented I never saw—The furniture, upholstery, china, mirrors, carpets, & everything indicated in its selection both wealth & good taste—but it was, [sic] broken up smashed into fragments & left in the house—bureaus turned up side down & broken—beds ripped open—Library turned up side down, books & papers torn & mutilated—simply for mischief—I gathered up the private letters & placed them in a box—placed a guard & left—

The evidence reported by Captain Larned and a letter of Brig. Gen. Edward A. Wild confirm Miss Tyler's complaint about the sacking of Sherwood Forest in May 1864 by General Wild's troops. [5] Colonel Tyler's record, Captain Larned's letter, and Mr. Peckham's account all confirm that in the following month there were still Tyler manuscripts in the house. Nothing else has been discovered about the "private letters" which Larned "gathered up" and "placed . . . in a box." It may be that they remained there until Mrs. Tyler returned to Sherwood Forest a year later.

A small part of Tyler's papers must have been at "Villa Margaret," a summer house near Hampton, Va. George Templeton Strong described a visit there in his diary on June 4, 1861: [6] "called at ex-President Tyler's country house and entered it through a cellar window. He was out. He and all his family fled with precipitation some ten days ago. Signs of hasty, terrified flight abounded in the house; bureau drawers pulled out and left on the floor, unimportant papers scattered over the floor. I secured two or three scraps of the Tylerian correspondence . . ."

Julia Gardiner Tyler, the President's widow, was a New Yorker by birth but a Southerner by conviction. She and her children were able to spend most of the war years with her mother on Staten Island, N.Y. Since she had highly placed friends on both sides of the conflict, she managed to keep in touch with events at her home and even to make a trip by sea late in 1862 and in 1863 to Sherwood Forest and back to Staten Island. [7] Whether or not Mrs. Tyler took any manuscripts to or from Sherwood Forest must be left to conjecture. There is no evidence to suggest that she did; in fact, the circumstances of her trip through the lines make this seem an unlikely possibility. She was certainly aware of the depredations at Sherwood Forest in 1864; she wrote two letters to Abraham Lincoln and other letters to Gen. Benjamin F. Butler pleading for the protection of her kin and her property. [8] Of other arrangements to protect or to remove her possessions, we know that she stated in a letter of November 7, 1864, to Butler: [9] "Little thinking that my house would be so torn to pieces by a passing army, any more than in the past, I made no further disposition of its contents on leaving to make my home here [Staten Island] than I would have done in peaceful times."

How is such evidence to be reconciled with the accounts given in subsequent years by the President's widow and their son, Lyon G. Tyler? In the late 1860's Julia Tyler wrote to George Ticknor Curtis about Secretary of State Daniel Webster's notes to President Tyler relating to the Webster-Ashburton Treaty: [10] "Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to be able to enclose you the notes referred to, but all the papers of my Husband, public and private, left to my care at his death, were destroyed in the burning of Rich'd, where I had stored them for safe keeping on leaving Virginia in a perilous manner during the War."

Many years later, in 1910, Dr. Tyler, in reply to an inquiry made by Gaillard Hunt, then Chief of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, wrote: [11] "As you are probably aware, all of President Tyler's correspondence together with an account of his Bank vetoes and notes in extenso were destroyed in the Richmond fire of 1865."

Lyon G. Tyler was only 11 years of age when the Richmond fire occurred, and it is not reasonable to expect him to have any exact recollection or even knowledge of events of that time and earlier. The words of at least one contemporary confirm that Julia Tyler did place some papers in the Farmers Bank for safekeeping. These were destroyed during the fire of April 2-3, 1865. This loss was reported to Mrs. Tyler in a letter dated July 3 from William H. MacFarland. [12]

What conclusions are possible? It is clear that some Tyler papers were placed in the Farmers Bank and later destroyed there; it is equally clear that some were left at Sherwood Forest, and it is possible that some which survive today were
among those left in his home. A few were at Villa Margaret, but the record does not reveal their fate. [13] It is not clear how many or what proportion of the papers were in any of these places.

The Tyler Papers now in the Library of Congress and indexed in this publication were collected by Lyon G. Tyler, who became in fact the President's literary executor. He began with a few surviving documents, including possibly a part of the autograph collection mentioned in his father's will. From friends and contemporaries of his father he solicited letters that had been written to them. The original documents he was able to obtain in this way remained in his possession for many years and formed the basis for his three-volume study, *Letters and Times of the Tylers* (1884-96), which was for decades the standard account of the family and is still a useful work. He sold the papers to the Library of Congress in 1919. A few Tyler manuscripts and photocopies have been acquired by the Library since 1919 and have been incorporated in the first series. The number of documents in the Tyler Papers now in the Library of Congress is 1,410.

The Library evacuated its unique and particularly prized materials during World War II. The Tyler Papers, with other manuscripts, were removed on December 29, 1941, to the Alderman Library of the University of Virginia at Charlottesville. They were returned on August 14, 1944. [14] Since 1944 the Tyler Papers have remained in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, where they may be consulted subject to the usual conditions. Original Tyler materials or copies of them continue to come to the Manuscript Division. Those which are received without restriction may eventually be microfilmed and indexed as a supplement to the entire microfilm reproduction of the Library's Presidential collections.

Inasmuch as the bulk of President Tyler's papers is lost, searchers may wish to examine the personal papers of his contemporaries in the Library of Congress for information about him and his times. The personal papers, sets of records, or autograph collections which follow contain letters written by President Tyler, retained copies of letters written to him, or letters or other documents referring to him:

- [American Colonization Society Records](#)
- [Biddle, Nicholas](#)
- [Blair Family Papers](#)
- [Butler, Benjamin F.](#)
- [Clay, Henry](#)
- [Corcoran, W. W.](#)
- [Crittenden, John J.](#)
- [Cushing, Caleb](#)
- [Ewing, Thomas](#)
- [Fish, Hamilton](#)
- [Floyd, John](#)
- [Force, Peter](#)
- [Galloway-Marcy-Markoe](#)
- [Garrett Family Papers](#)
- [Granger, Gideon and Francis](#)
- [Green, Duff](#)
- [Hammond, James H.](#)
- [Hart, C. C. Autograph Collection](#)
- [Holmes, George F.](#)
- [Johnson, Andrew](#)
- [Kennedy, John P.](#)
- [Lawson, Thomas](#)
- [Long, Breckinridge](#)
- [Mangum, Willie P.](#)
- [Marcy, William L.](#)
- [Murphy, John B., Collection of Presidential Wills](#)
- [Presidential Manuscripts—General](#)
- [Rives, W. C.](#)
- [Simmons, James F.](#)
- [Smith, J. Henley](#)
- [Stephens, Alexander H.](#)
- [Stevenson, Andrew](#)
Many other libraries and many autograph collectors possess one or more Tyler documents. No attempt to list comprehensively the libraries or collectors or the documents they own can be undertaken here. One large group is the Gardiner Family Papers in the Yale University Library. These contain some 5,000 personal and business papers and include letters from President Tyler and the second Mrs. Tyler. An attractive description of the Gardiner Family Papers by Howard Gotlieb and Gail Grimes is in print. The College of William and Mary Library possesses more than 100 letters written by Tyler to Alexander and David Gardiner, his brothers-in-law, and others, as well as the papers of Lyon G. Tyler. John Tyler manuscripts are also in the William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Mich.; the Long Island Historical Society, Brooklyn, N.Y.; the New Jersey Historical Society, Newark, N.J.; the New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.; the New York Public Library, New York, N.Y.; the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa.; the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, N.Y.; the Southern Historical Collection of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C.; and the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis. The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections now being assembled at the Library of Congress may in due course reveal the whereabouts of other Tyler manuscripts.

Note: Grateful acknowledgment is made to Oliver P. Chitwood for reading and commenting on a draft of this essay.

1. Photostat in John B. Murphy Collection of Presidential Wills, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

2. Recollections of the Civil War, with Many Original Diary Entries and Letters Written from the Seat of War, and with Annotated References (New York, 1912), 217.


5. Edward A. Wild to Benjamin F. Butler, May 13, 1864, Private and Official Correspondence of General Benjamin F. Butler, IV (Norwood, Mass., 1917), 203. See also letters exchanged by General and Mrs. Butler dated May 19, 21, 22, 23, and 24, ibid., 235, 244-45, 249, 256-57, 262.


8. Her letters to President Lincoln are dated May 21 and August 15, 1864; to General Butler, June 2, July 24, August 15, and November 7; see also John G. Nicolay to Mrs. Tyler, August 17, and General Butler's reply to her August 19. The originals are in the Butler Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; part of them are printed in Private and Official Correspondence . . ., IV, 244, 301-2; V, 15, 53, 81-83, 329.


11. December 3, 1910; Manuscript Division files.

13. A Bible reported to have been taken from President Tyler's house near Hampton was returned to the Tyler family; *Tyler's Quarterly*. . ., II (1920-21), 358-59. A search of the records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, National Archives, in the summer of 1960 revealed no reference to any Tyler manuscripts at Villa Margaret. The property was returned to Mrs. Tyler in 1867.


15. Cited in Selected Bibliography.

**Scope and Content Note for Additions to the Collection**

Material added to the John Tyler Papers since the collection was filmed in 1961 has been organized as *Series 4, Addenda*, spanning the period 1830-1863. The correspondence and other items in the addenda are grouped by the year in which each addition was processed.

The 1979 Addition includes twelve letters to and from Tyler and a letter fragment. Correspondents include Hugh B. Grigsby, John Leeds Kerr, James Lyons, Cincinnatus Newton, Judge Tucker, and John Tyler's daughter, Mary Tyler, and son, Robert Tyler.

The 1997 Addition contains three items of correspondence, one of which is a photostatic copy, and an engraved portrait. One letter, dated 1832, contains advice and news from Tyler to his daughter Mary at the family home in Virginia. A letter of condolence from clergyman Septimus Tustin upon the death of Tyler's wife, Letitia Christian Tyler, is dated 1842. A copy of Tyler's letter of recommendation for the superintendency of Harper's Ferry Armory, dated 1841, was written during his brief tenure as vice president in the administration of William Henry Harrison. The engraved portrait was published in New York by Johnson, Fry & Company in 1863 "from the original painting by Chapel."

**Arrangement of the Papers**

This collection is arranged in four series:

- Series 1. General Correspondence, 1710-1861
- Series 2. Autograph Collection, 1691-1917
- Series 3. Additional Correspondence, 1844-1918
- Series 4. Addenda, 1830-1863
## Description of Series

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<tr>
<th>Container</th>
<th>Series</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REEL 1-2</td>
<td><strong>Series 1, General Correspondence, 1710-1861</strong>&lt;br&gt;Bound volumes of letters and copies of letters to or from Tyler and a few other documents.&lt;br&gt;Arranged chronologically.</td>
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<tr>
<td>REEL 2-3</td>
<td><strong>Series 2, Autograph Collection, 1691-1917</strong>&lt;br&gt;Bound volumes of letters and documents assembled by Lyon G. Tyler.&lt;br&gt;Arranged alphabetically with a few oddments at the end.</td>
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<td>REEL 3</td>
<td><strong>Series 3, Additional Correspondence, 1844-1918</strong>&lt;br&gt;Letters to or from Julia Gardiner Tyler and other women of the Tyler family.&lt;br&gt;Arranged chronologically.</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOX 4:1</td>
<td><strong>Series 4, Addenda, 1830-1863</strong>&lt;br&gt;Letters to and from Tyler, a letter fragment, and an engraved portrait.&lt;br&gt;Grouped by the year in which each addition was processed.</td>
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## Container List

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<tr>
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<td><strong>REEL 1</strong></td>
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<td><strong>REEL 2</strong></td>
<td>1855, June 14-1861&lt;br&gt;<a href="#">Digital content available</a></td>
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<td>A-Z and miscellaneous&lt;br&gt;<a href="#">Digital content available</a></td>
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<td><strong>REEL 3</strong></td>
<td>Miscellaneous&lt;br&gt;<a href="#">Digital content available</a></td>
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<td><strong>BOX 4:1</strong></td>
<td>Engraved portrait, 1863&lt;br&gt;<a href="#">Digital content available</a></td>
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Selected Bibliography

Chitwood, Oliver P., John Tyler, Champion of the Old South (New York, 1939), p. xiii-xv.
Tyler, Lyon G., Letters and Times of the Tylers (Richmond and Williamsburg, 1884-96), 3 volumes.