

**CSPAN ANNA HARRISON, LETITIA TYLER, JULIA TYLER  
APRIL 9, 2014**

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

FEMALE: She was not happy that her husband had been elected president. She was not looking forward to being first lady. The problem was of course that he died only one month into his presidency and she never made it to Washington.

TAYLOR STOERMER, HISTORIAN: In 1836, when John Tyler resigned from the United States Senate he and his wife Letitia and their family moved here to Williamsburg. It's right here that Letitia Tyler suffered her stroke in 1839, John Tyler learned that he was elected as vice president to William Henry Harrison and it's also here in the spring of 1841 where he was informed that he became 10th President of the United States and that Letitia Tyler learned that she became the first lady.

FEMALE: She has another terrible stroke and dies and her husband goes into great mourning. And then he meets Julia Gardiner who is this -- another young lovely in her 20s.

MALE: Julie, I think of as the Madonna, you know, of first ladies. She loved publicity.

She had actually posed as a model at a time when that was maybe, say, frowned upon but all accounts was bewitching.

FEMALE: Julia was at Sherwood Forest at the beginning of the war. There were a total of almost 90 slaves and they were totally her supervision.

Julia did, I just use the word, "lobby" for her husband and she supported him tremendously in everything that she did.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SUSAN SWAIN, HOST: Untimely deaths, a secret marriage and outsized personalities are a part of the stories of the three women featured in our program tonight. As our political system grapples with the first time a vice president steps into the office of the presidency and sectional differences continue to grow in the country.

Good evening and welcome to C-SPAN's series First Ladies: Influence and Image. Tonight the election of 1840, which brings William Henry Harrison into office and just a month later, he dies, the first time a president dies in office.

To learn about the tumultuous period of time, we have asked Edna Greene Medford to our set tonight. She is the chair of the history department of Howard University and has been working with C-SPAN many times over the years in our history series.

Edna, nice to see you again.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD, PROFESSOR OF HISTORY: Nice to be here.

SUSAN SWAIN: Well, school children have all grown up with the phrase from the 1840 election, Tippecanoe and Tyler Too. It was William Henry Harrison's campaign. He was elected at the age of 68, a record that no president broke again until Ronald Reagan was elected.

Who was this man and why did he so easily defeat Martin Van Buren?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Well, let me see at the outset, I announce with a bit of pride that he was from Charles City County, Virginia, my hometown, my home county, but he moved to Ohio.

He was a military man initially. He had actually studied medicine for a short period of time and decided to join the military shortly thereafter, moved to Ohio. He became the territorial governor of Indiana and was before that a noted Indian fighter.

The term "Tippecanoe" comes from the Battle of Tippecanoe where he fought against Tecumseh and his brother. The two Native Americans were attempting to establish a pan-Indian movement. And as territorial governor, Tyler was instrumental -- excuse me -- Harrison was instrumental in securing land for white settlers and of course, that clashed with Native American interest.

And so at that battle, Harrison was considered the victor. We're not so certain about that but he became important enough in that battle that it carried him into public office, was one of the things that did.

SUSAN SWAIN: His wife, Anna Harrison, was not happy about him being drawn back into politics. In fact, we have a quote from her that says, "I wish my husband's friends had left him where he is, happy and contented in retirement."

How was he drawn into politics again? And then let's talk about what kind of a political spouse she was.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Well, it's an interesting time in American political history because it's the period of the Second American Party System. There are two very distinct parties, the Democratic Party with Andrew Jackson as leader and then the Whig Party that grows out of opposition to Jackson primarily.

And so William Henry Harrison becomes a member of the Whig party soon after it is founded and in fact, he is the first candidate for that party in 1836. But because they didn't have themselves together, there was no possibility of him winning. But in 1840, they were organized well enough and the Democrats were divided enough that he was able to win.

SUSAN SWAIN: So Anna Harrison, his spouse, had been with him through a long political career. What do we really know about this woman?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: We don't know an awful lot about her. We know that she was a very religious woman. We know that she was a reluctant first lady.

She didn't get to be first lady in the White House, of course, because the day that her husband and other members of the family left to go to Washington, she was too ill to travel and curiously enough - well, ironically enough, I guess, the day that she was all packed up and ready to join him in Washington was the day that she got notification that he had died.

SUSAN SWAIN: How did he die?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: That's an interesting question. The argument has always been that he died because he was not prudent enough to wear a top hat and coat at his inauguration. And he spoke too long and so he was exposed to very cold weather and he caught a cold and died.

I think it's a little bit more complex than that. He was an older gentleman. As you said, he was 68.

He was exhausted by all of the office seekers in the first month of his presidency and I think the -- all of that compromised his health. And so he did eventually catch a very bad cold that turned into pneumonia and as a consequence of that, he did die.

SUSAN SWAIN: Of Anna Harrison, we do know from some biographies that she was the first first lady to have a public education...

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Um-hum.

SUSAN SWAIN: ... and that she was an avid reader of political journals throughout her life.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Um-hum.

SUSAN SWAIN: Do we have any sense if she'd had more time at all, from historic research, about what kind of first lady she might have been?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: She certainly did read political journals but I don't know that she was a very political person. I don't believe that she would have had the role that some other first ladies did later on and especially the person who follows her as first lady, the second person actually, John Tyler's second wife.

But I think that -- well at least she certainly, during the time that -- even though she didn't come to the White House, she did use her influence, what influence she had, to get appointments for her nephews and for her sons and grandsons. So she would have been political in that way but not in the way that we would think of someone like Julia Tyler.

SUSAN SWAIN: Which we'll learn much more about as our program continues tonight. On Twitter, President Ponderings (ph) asks this question or makes this comment, "Anna Harrison's husband became president, her son a congressmen, her grandson also a president. She must have had good genes."

What was going on in the Harrison family that it produced so many political leaders?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Well, they considered the first -- one of the first families of Virginia. And so you would've had Harrisons who were very much involved in the American Revolution. You had one signing the Declaration of Independence. So they have this long history of political involvement.

I think two, it's where they're located by the mid-1800s in that Northwest territory in this area that's opening up for the country and these men are getting very politically involved because of that.

SUSAN SWAIN: Related, RJ Wilson (ph) on our Facebook page asked, "Is it true that Anna Harrison helped raised her grandson Benjamin Harrison who became president? Any sense or what kind of influence she had on him as a future president?"

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Well, she certainly did live with the family in her later years. Her home burned and she went to live with one of her sons and of course he was the father of Benjamin.

What influence she had on him, we really don't know but we assume that as grandmothers are one to do, they do have influence.

SUSAN SWAIN: Well, there was a brief tenure, only a month in the White House, but there were some social things that had to happen.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Um-hum.

SUSAN SWAIN: So how did that role that fulfilled without a first lady here?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Because she was not there, there were two other women who carried out her duties, one was Jane Irwin Harrison who actually was a widow. She was married to one of the Harrison men but he had died and so William Henry apparently asked her to serve in that capacity.

And she was assisted by one of her aunts by the same name, Jane Irwin Findlay, with an older woman and gave her son guidance. She was not the official hostess of the White House but she did give her a lot of guidance.

SUSAN SWAIN: And is it true that Dolly Madison, who seems to pop up regularly as we progress along here, also was around to offer advice?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: I think Dolly Madison offered advice whenever she got away with it and so yes, she would have been nearby to help out from time to time.

SUSAN SWAIN: So one lasting legacy is that she was the first presidential widow that was able to get a pension for her service.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Um-hum.

SUSAN SWAIN: How did that happen? What were the politics of that?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Well, you know, her husband had died in office and she needed the assistance and so they -- Congress did appropriate \$25,000 for her.

SUSAN SWAIN: Which is not an unsubstantial amount of money if you were to calculate it today, 25,000...

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Pretty big piece of change, yes.

SUSAN SWAIN: ... in lump sum.

And when he dies in office, this is the first time that this had happened.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Um-hum.

SUSAN SWAIN: Did it create a constitutional crisis?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: It certainly did.

The Constitution does indicate that if the president is not there -- it doesn't say specifically death, I don't believe, but if the president is unable to perform the duties then those duties fall on the vice president.

But it didn't say what the status of that person would be. Would he be carrying out the duties and responsibilities as vice president, as acting president or as the new president? And so John Tyler decided that he was not going to let them think too long about that and so he declared himself the president. And he had Congress -- well Congress agreed to pass resolutions -- both houses to pass resolutions declaring him president.

Not everyone agreed with that, however, and so occasionally mail came to the White House addressed to be acting president or to the vice president and Tyler had those documents returned unopened.

SUSAN SWAIN: Who was John Tyler?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: He too was born in Charles City County, Virginia. He lived only a couple of miles -- he was born only a couple of miles down the road from the Harrison estate at Berkeley Plantation. He was born in Greenway.

He was an interesting president because although he was elected on the Whig ticket with William Henry Harrison, he actually had been a Jacksonian Democrat earlier on in his political career and had clashed with Jackson and the Democrats and had joined the Whig party. But once he became president, he sort of abandoned the Whig platform and angered them and they expelled him from the party.

SUSAN SWAIN: Well, we're going to learn more about the John Tyler presidency and the two women who served as his -- his first lady. We're going to do that by introducing you to the life that they had in what we call now today, Colonial Williamsburg.

Let's look.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

TAYLOR STOERMER: In 1836 when John Tyler resigned from the United States Senate, he and his wife Letitia and their family moved here to Williamsburg to establish his law practice. In fact, we've reconstructed his law office and his laundry.

The house that they lived in is no longer here. But here in Williamsburg, they're perfectly situated at the center of the town, at the center of the legal part of the town -- the courthouse is right across the street -- near all of the markets, near all of the shops that are up and down Duke of Gloucester Street.

Now this is sort of the beating heart of Williamsburg even in the 1830s. And so all of the political activity, the social activity, they're really living at the center of it in this fantastic 18th century house that they were living in as John Tyler is resurrecting his political career.

After they move here when Letitia is sort of running this household and running the entire Tyler family, she's going to be operating out of the house, kind of the business that is the Tyler family running their various plantations all over the place.

It's right here that Letitia Tyler suffered her stroke in 1839 that partly paralyzed her although she was still able to retain control of the family -- the family accounts, of all of the family business while John Tyler was actually getting back involved in politics.

It's right here in this space that John Tyler learned that he was elected as vice president to William Henry Harrison and it's also here in the spring of 1841 where he was informed that he became 10th President of the United States and of course, here that Letitia Tyler learned that she became the first lady of the United States.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SUSAN SWAIN: And now we're back on the set and joining us is the gentleman that you saw in that video.

Taylor Stoermer is a Colonial Williamsburg historian. He's also an expert on the history of the Tidewater area in Virginia where the Tylers hailed from.

How important -- well, give us a sense of Tidewater, Virginia in that period of time and what kind of characteristics a person in public life would bring with them to the office from having been there?

TAYLOR STOERMER: I think that when you're talking about Virginia in that period, they're still getting over the American Revolution or maybe not quite yet. They're not letting go of the American Revolution, not letting go of Thomas Jefferson and the kind of revolutionary principles that are supposed to inform public conduct and public virtue.

But by the time he get to the -- by the time you get to -- through John Tyler's career in public office, by the time you get to the 1820s and 1830s, those things start to be coalesced into notions about states' rights, notions about what is the proper use of the Constitution, notions about what the extent of federal authority is.

You hear people like John Tyler talk a great deal about the principles of 1798 thinking about the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions and the ability of the states to override unconstitutional or, so they think, unconstitutional federal actions. And so these principles of the American Revolution are being -- are being still thought about, they're being thought over but also the kind of things that come to what are the expectations of a public leader? They need to be virtuous, they need to be disinterested and that is the only way that you can actually make good public policy.

SUSAN SWAIN: So Letitia and John Tyler, Bethany Johnson (ph) wants to know where did they meet?

TAYLOR STOERMER: Letitia and John Tyler, actually they met where almost everybody on the Tidewater meets, in Williamsburg. They -- they actually live not that far from one another. John Tyler is from Charles City County in a place called Greenway and Letitia Tyler is from New Kent County, which is really just a stone's throw away from Charles City County.

And they -- we don't know exactly where they met but we know that they met at -- in about 1811, 1812. John Tyler went to William and Mary with Letitia's brother. And so their families certainly became involved with one another and they met at a very young age. They were both the exact same age so they were 21, 22 when they met and they fell in love quite quickly.

SUSAN SWAIN: We've already been incorporating some of your Tweets and Facebook comments into our program tonight but you can also call us with your questions and we look forward to your participation.

If you live in the Eastern or Central time zones, our number is 202-585-3880.

If you live in the Mountain, Pacific or farther west, 202-585-3881.

And we're hoping you Texans will line up in your phone calls tonight because this White House was responsible for the annexation of Texas into the union and we'll learn more about the role that John Tyler's second wife played in that very momentous decision.

So the Tylers, Letitia and John, had a lot of children.

TAYLOR STOERMER: They have a lot of children. That's one of the things that really kept them apart for a great chunk of their married life because John Tyler was constitutionally incapable of being out of public office. He was addicted to it to a certain extent so left Letitia at home to run the

family, to run the business and to continue to manage this incredible brood of children that they had almost from the -- almost from the very start.

SUSAN SWAIN: And running their plantation would've been how large an operation?

TAYLOR STOERMER: Well they had a number of different plantations.

One of the issues with John Tyler and with the family is that they are always on the very edge of solvency and so they never live in one place for longer than 10 years. They were always moving around.

And so their plantations, they own probably no more than between 30 and 35 slaves at a particular time and they're growing mainly wheat and corn over about 600 to 900 acres and that's between -- they owned plantations -- several plantations in Charles City County, they then moved to Gloucester County on the other side of the York River in Virginia and so they're continuing to try to figure out a way during these very -- these very striking economic -- very striking economic changes to the country like what follows, the Panic of 1819 or that go into what's going on in the -- in the late -- in 1837 to find a way that they can keep their heads economically above water.

And with John Tyler gone for so long, that -- and for so often, six months out of every year while he's in public office, this leaves a lot of that burden resting on Letitia's shoulders.

SUSAN SWAIN: One gets the sense -- and listening to the video we saw from Colonial Williamsburg -- that this was a pretty tough woman. I mean, she had a stroke and was partially paralyzed and yet continued to handle the operations.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: And I think that's indicative of -- of the kind of life that women lived during that time, even wealthy women, you know. This was not -- it was rural living and life was tough for them but life was made easier for them by their enslaved laborers and they certainly did use those to great advantage for them.

SUSAN SWAIN: What is known -- question for both of you about the Tyler's attitude at this point -- with Letitia Tyler and John about their attitude toward slavery?

TAYLOR STOERMER: We know quite a bit.

John Tyler is one of the staunchest supporters of slavery that ever inhabited the White House. He was vocal about it throughout most of his career and he believed firmly and he said that slavery is the greatest property that a Southerner can own. He believes this is the backbone of the society.

Letitia, we know a little bit less about. We know from -- from a story that actually ends up in some of the abolitionist press later on in the 19th century of a -- of a former enslaved man who had been a member, in fact, of the Christian family who recalled that that -- that John Tyler actually would -- he may have been less kind to -- to the enslaved men and women who are out in the fields. But when it came to the enslaved men and women in the household that he -- that he -- that he stopped right there, that they wanted Letitia's protection and they were treated very well.

Now you can read a little bit too much into a story like that. But whereas we have some very clear understanding of what John Tyler's views are and they're consistent throughout his life, Letitia is a bit different.

SUSAN SWAIN: Dr. Medford, we've been, each program, looking at the census statistics for the time period and here's the 1840 view of America through the census: The population had reached 17

million in now 26 states. That's a 32 percent growth since the 1830 census and we consistently see 30 percent each (inaudible) 10 years.

The slaves numbered 2.5 million, which was almost 15 percent of the population and another sea change, New Orleans joins the list of the largest cities in the United States.

So I want to ask you two things on that. We heard about the Tylers and their attitudes toward slavery. Give us a quick capsulation of what was happening in the country at large over slavery at this point in 1840.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: This is a tremendous period of sectional tension. There -- we -- we sometimes like to think that the country's divided regionally, that everyone in the North is anti-slavery and everyone in the South is pro-slavery. It's not quite that simple but at the same time, it does tend to fall along those lines for specific reasons.

First of all, people in the North who had benefited from slavery and the slave trade certainly, until it was ended in 1808, now have moved into a different economic arena. They no longer need slavery and in fact, slavery is a threat to them because of the free labor system in the North. And the kind of economy that is needed to preserve institutions in the North are different from those in the South.

And so what's happening in Congress is both groups want to control the legislation because if you are a more industrialized region then you want certain kinds of laws passed that they're going to support that economy. If you're more agrarian than you're going to be at laws that will -- will support that.

And so there's a tremendous amount of concern about the expansion of slavery. It's not so much that Northerners are anti-slavery because they're humanitarians but it's because of how slavery impacts them or how the expansion could impact them.

SUSAN SWAIN: Barbara is our first caller tonight from Brownstown, Michigan.

You're on the air, welcome.

FEMALE: Good evening, C-SPAN. I love this series.

I would like to know what was the duration of both of the president's marriages and how many children would he have had as a result of both marriages? Thank you so much.

SUSAN SWAIN: Thank you.

I saw one book that referred to John Tyler as the father of our country.

(LAUGHTER)

(CROSSTALK)

TAYLOR STOERMER: I think that they had 16 or 17 children. It depends upon whether you count the ones who lived (inaudible) 16 or 17.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: I think a total of 15.

TAYLOR STOERMER: Totally?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Um-hum. I believe a total because there were eight by Letitia.

TAYLOR STOERMER: Right.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: And I think one died very quickly, that was in 1825, and then seven by Julia but with a very, much shorter marriage too.

TAYLOR STOERMER: Right. That's because they -- he was married to Letitia for 29 years and then he was married to Julia from 1844 to when he died in 1862 so 18.

SUSAN SWAIN: Well, the -- the Tylers learn, as you tell us, of the fact that they are coming to the White House and he is the 10th President of the United States.

Letitia's health is precarious. How does she carry out the role of first lady?

TAYLOR STOERMER: Well, it depends what you mean by first lady and I think that it gets us into a very interesting conversation about what is a first lady? Is it just someone who happens to be married to the president or they have to fulfill these very particular roles?

And so with Letitia, she is by nature a retired person. She prefers to stay at home. She prefers a quiet life. She does not like the kind of public activities that a -- that first lady -- we normally associate with the first lady. So even -- even without her illness, even without the stroke, I think it would have been a fairly quiet White House in the residence.

However, that doesn't mean that there aren't other people there to fulfill these roles. That just means that she has to have other people do it for them. And it's a big family as we pointed out. It is a -- it is a closely knit family, they have their -- a lot of their daughters were living in the White House. They have a son and -- a son and daughter-in-law living in the White House.

So she really turns all of that extraordinary social energy over to them, in particular their daughter-in-law Priscilla Cooper Tyler.

SUSAN SWAIN: Well, Gary Robinson (ph) timely asks us by Twitter, "What role did Priscilla Cooper have during Letitia's White House and after her death"?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: She is serving as unofficial hostess and -- and with -- especially with the Tyler daughter, Letitia, the namesake. She is an interesting person because she was an actress at a time when it was not a good thing for a woman to be doing that, it was not considered respectable. But the Tylers accepted her and more importantly, Letitia accepted her. She was very close to her.

And so she would have been performing most of the functions that Mrs. Tyler would have been performing had she been able to do so. And it's not so much that she is not doing anything. Even though she's disabled because of the stroke, she's still giving orders from her bedroom, so to speak, and she can't go out in the way that Priscilla can and her daughter can. But she's doing some things.

SUSAN SWAIN: John Tyler's presidency was full of momentous issues. Do we have any evidence that Letitia Tyler counseled him politically?

TAYLOR STOERMER: Yes, we have -- we have evidence that she counseled him in one very, very important way. Earlier in their life, she told him to get out of politics, come home, stay out of it, I want you here. But of course, as we talked about, he couldn't stay out of politics. So by the time he was in the Senate in 1830s, she gave up.

After that, while he -- mentioned over and over again in letters to their children that she -- he respected deeply her prudence and her judgment, that political issues, he generally reserved those kind of discussions with his (inaudible).

SUSAN SWAIN: There was a big debate in the Congress about whether or not there should be appropriations for this vice president who assumed the presidency and whether or not they should pay for his expenses in the White House yet you suggest that they entertain quite a lot.

How did they do that?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: It had to have been with his own funds...

(LAUGHTER)

... because Congress did not appropriate money for them, at least not to fix up the White House and the White House was an absolute mess at that time, just really in very poor repair. So he must have used some of his own funds to -- to -- to entertain people and they did entertain lavishly.

SUSAN SWAIN: But you suggested earlier that they were always on the edge of solvency so how did they do that?

TAYLOR STOERMER: There were on a shoestring so you assume that a lot of this is coming out of his salary as president.

One of the people who is the most extravagant in that entire White House is John Tyler himself. He spends most of his life in one sense -- in one sort of complicated (inaudible) after another and having his family, particularly people like Letitia, trying to -- trying to keep them outside of it yet there are these -- there are these lavish entertainments,

So Priscilla who probably was taking a page out of Louisa Catherine Adams' book, she holds two -- during the congressional session, she'll hold two formal dinner parties every week. She'll do -- every other week, she'll do public perceptions in the evenings. She will hold public parties every month that would have as many as a thousand people.

She opened up the White House on New Year's Eve -- on New Year's, she opened up the White House on July 4th and she started the tradition of having the Marine Band do -- perform in the South Lawn. They are finding ways to do that. But as Dr. Medford says, that -- that they might be doing it with mirrors because Congress given their battles with John Tyler, they don't appropriate a cent for the upkeep of that White House during his entire presidency.

SUSAN SWAIN: Next is a call from Marvin in Los Angeles.

Hi Marvin.

MALE: Hello.

My question has to do with a constitutional question.

Article II, Section 1 says, "The elector shall meet in their respective states and vote by ballot for two persons of whom one, at least, shall not be an inhabitant of the same state with themselves."

And if both of them came from the same county in Virginia, how was it that they could both be president and vice president?

And the second part of my question is, is it true that Tyler was called "his Accidenty" because of the way he took over as president through the death of Harrison?

Thank you very much for taking my question.

SUSAN SWAIN: Thanks for asking it, Marvin.

Dr. Medford?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: First of all, they were born in Charles City County, they were not living in Charles City County at the time that they were elected. Harrison was in Ohio. John Tyler was in Virginia but Harrison was in Ohio.

And the other question was about...

TAYLOR STOERMER: "His Accidenty."

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Oh, "his Accidenty."

TAYLOR STOERMER: As one of the things he was called.

(CROSSTALK)

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Absolutely. Yes. The accidental president or "his Accidenty" because no one when expected that John Tyler was going to ascend to the presidency.

SUSAN SWAIN: What kinds of issues that he face when he came to office?

TAYLOR STOERMER: Well, there are the personal ones and then there are the broader political ones.

The personal ones are that people didn't trust him, they didn't like him, they didn't expect that he was going to be on the ticket in the first place, he wasn't even the first choice of being a vice president official candidate for the Whig party and so they were fine with letting go off and live in Williamsburg while William Henry Harrison was in the White House. So those are sort of the personal things he has to deal with.

The border political issues are really -- there is certainly the issue over the renewal of the Bank of the United States. There are major issues over the tariff and over protective tariffs depending upon -- and how you felt about it depended upon what part of the country you lived in as to what was being protected and what wasn't

But of course the biggest one that comes up to define the presidency I think is really about the expansion of slavery, is the -- is the annexation of Texas and how -- what that means for the -- either the strength of the Republic or its weakness in terms of what you think of the impact that has on slavery.

SUSAN SWAIN: Next is a call from Harold watching us in Sioux City, Iowa.

MALE: Yes, thank you for taking my call and I really enjoy the program.

My question is will you -- you had a number of talks about Jackson and Tyler and they both had slaves.

How did those slaves fare after enduring the Civil War and were those plantations burned by the Yankees or how did that come out?

I'll hang up and I'll let you answer. Thank you.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Well, certainly the Union Army is coming though twice actually as a consequence of McClellan's Peninsula Campaign and each time that the Union Army comes though, the enslaved population leaves, they take the opportunity to leave.

What's happening in Charles City on the Tyler plantation, Sherwood Forest, is that Julia has left, she has fled and gone to New York at Staten Island to live with her mother. And so there are enslaved people left behind and they -- it is reported that some of them take over the plantation

Certainly the House is -- there are some things that are done by the Union Army probably and perhaps by local people as well. The plantation is in a bit of a mess when the war was over, which is not that unusual for plantations in certain areas of the South at that time.

They certainly do -- enslaved people certainly do suffer during the war, but they get their freedom as a consequence of it as well. And so there is an incident where Julia writes to President Lincoln because one of her neighbors who is a notorious cessationist is arrested by the Union Army and it happens to be a part of the Union Army that's under the control of General Wild who is commander of the African Brigade and some of the people who are attached to that unit had been enslaved by this gentleman, William Clopton and they are allowed to beat him and Julia is absolutely enraged of the idea.

She is also concerned as well that her niece is left behind so she is concerned about her well-being. But she actually writes to President Lincoln and complains about it and she signs her letter "Mrs. Ex-President Tyler," she loved to use that.

SUSAN SWAIN: Well we have not even introduced Julia into our tale yet so tell us about the death of Letitia Tyler in the White House.

TAYLOR STOERMER: She died on September 10th in 1842. She had another massive stroke.

SUSAN SWAIN: Did she die instantly?

TAYLOR STOERMER: She -- there is no evidence that there's any kind of lingering, that she dies fairly quickly and it is -- it hits the family like a ton of bricks.

SUSAN SWAIN: Was there a White House funeral for her?

TAYLOR STOERMER: Not that we know of, that they kept things very private. In fact, she was buried at her home, a place in New Kent County rather than at Greenway Court rather than anyplace else that they -- that they may have lived. She was buried at her home with her parents.

And so it was a very -- it was a very, very quiet -- a very quiet event but it was mostly manifested in the kind of impact that it had in her children. They were devastated.

SUSAN SWAIN: What about the president himself? What was his reaction to losing his wife?

TAYLOR STOERMER: Well, at that time from his letters, we know that he was, you know, obviously emotionally attached to Letitia (inaudible) a huge part of his life for a very long time and he loved her dearly.

However, we also have evidence that he is seeing Julia Gardiner Tyler probably about four months after her death.

SUSAN SWAIN: And who is Julia Gardiner?

TAYLOR STOERMER: Julia Gardiner, who Richard Norton Smith called (inaudible) Madonna of the period -- Julia Gardiner is a -- she's a young woman from Long Island, New York from East Hampton from where in fact Anna Harrison had gone to school. She is from a very well-known longstanding New York family with ties deep into the 17th century. They own Gardiner's Island and the family still owns Gardiner's Island and she -- her father was a New York State senator.

They were in Washington frequently for the social seasons and she was well-known at the White House and was well-known to the daughters of the Tylers and was even known to come over not just for the levies, but -- and for the parties but to do things like quiet games of whist.

And so the families -- the family knew her quite well. She was quite beautiful and quite rambunctious and was very well-educated, both here and in Europe, so it made her quite a charming woman to be around.

SUSAN SWAIN: And she quickly caught the widowed president's eye?

TAYLOR STOERMER: She quickly caught the widowed president's eye. This moved shocking very quickly.

SUSAN SWAIN: When -- we have to establish the difference in age between the two.

TAYLOR STOERMER: Yes, Julia Gardiner is 30 years, almost exactly, younger -- was 30 years younger than John Tyler. And so when they got married, she was 24 and he was 54.

SUSAN SWAIN: One of the amazing things -- we told you how many children John Tyler had. One of his grandchildren is still alive and inhabits Sherwood Forest, which is the Tyler's home in the Tidewater area of Virginia -- you're looking at a picture of it right now -- and he and his wife are residents of the house but they also make it available for tours.

Harrison Tyler is his name. He's 84 years old and we visited him recently in Sherwood Forest, the Tyler's home, where he told us the story of the fateful event that brought Julia and John Tyler together.

(BEGIN CLIP VIDEO)

HARRISON TYLER: So in March of 1844, she came to the Anacostia Naval Yard in Washington and they fell down at the tunnel. When they got to Fort Belvedere, put a barge out into the bay, you know, they'd fire the big cannon at the barge and it does not report whether they hit it or not but everybody was very pleased with that cannon.

The ship turned around and headed back to Washington. The hardcore few wanted "Let's fire this gun again." So they sent request down to the captain to stop the ship, "Let's fire the gun." But it was turned down.

Well, at that point, somebody looked over and as they're passing (inaudible). So the request was changed to stop the ship and fire the gun in honor of our first president and they couldn't turn that down. But when the ship did face downstream, the gun -- to fire the cannon -- the gun, instead of firing, the right breach blew up and it killed seven people. Among them Sandra Gardiner, also Abel Upshur, the Secretary of State, Thomas Walker Gilmer, the Secretary of the Navy.

Everybody downstairs felt the ship -- when the gun exploded, the ship jerked. So all the handsome young officers that were surrounding my grandmother, who was 23 years old at the time but very beautiful, my grandfather, he had been trying to get to her and talk to her and he couldn't because of all the handsome young naval officers around. But when explosion occurred and the ship shook, they all rushed to go upstairs to do what they had to do, whatever they're trained to do and left her standing there.

Well, she -- she knew her father was up there so she fell in behind them, my grandfather fell in behind her, going up the steps to the deck, a sailor came running back calling out, "Don't let Ms. Gardiner farther, her father is dead."

When she heard that, my grandmother fainted right back into the arms of the president. He caught her tenderly and gently. So the ship did go and dock and when it docked, he picked her up and carried her down the gangplank. As she was going down the gangplank, she came to.

Later, she wrote her mother saying that the first thing she remembered was going down the gangplank in the arms of the president and she struggled and her head had -- it fell over into the crook of his arm and she could look up into his eyes and she wrote her mother saying "I realize for the first time that president loved me dearly."

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SUSAN SWAIN: We promised at that outset that there would be a tale of a secret marriage. So tell the story.

(LAUGHTER)

TAYLOR STOERMER: June 26, 1844, it's only four months after the disaster of the USS Princeton so Julia's father has only been dead for four months and so there is still a period of mourning that should be publicly and appropriately observed. But he has -- but John Tyler has secured -- even in that rough period of time secured the permission of her mother for them to get married.

She was worried about his financial situation and about whether or not he would be able to continue her into the manner that was accustomed and when he was able to do that sufficiently she gave her permission. She had -- they had a very, very small, private secret wedding at an Episcopal Church in New York City. There were only a handful of people there, one of his sons, a couple of his political friends and a few members of her family. But the public didn't know about it until the next day.

SUSAN SWAIN: So the president disappears from Washington, checks himself into a hotel in New York City and gets married.

TAYLOR STOERMER: Um-hum. Yeah, it shows up in the newspaper that -- well, he's just going off to basically -- he's going off for his health. He's going to take a little bit of a vacation and he pops up in New York City and then it's in the newspaper the next day, oh by the way, the president has just gotten married to one of New York's most prominent social families.

SUSAN SWAIN: What was the reaction at that time?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Well, people, you know, gossiped about it. It was were so soon after his wife's death although it really was not that soon after her death. But they were very much concerned about the age difference with many people feeling that it was unfair to Julia that she was married to this man who was so much older than she was. So a lot of people didn't like it, his daughters certainly did not.

TAYLOR STOERMER: They certainly thought that it was too soon.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Absolutely because they were very loyal to their mother, understandably. But there was one daughter who never got over Letitia and the other daughters made their peace and that the sons never seemed to have a problem with it. But that one daughter never reconciled with her stepmother.

SUSAN SWAIN: Here is Julia Tyler who was quite a letter writer. So here's one of the letter she wrote to her mother about this event, "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."

TAYLOR STOERMER: That that was secret was, yeah.

SUSAN SWAIN: Yeah and let's go on to this because this is -- this could be rather self-revealing. The president says, "I am the best of diplomatists. I have commenced my auspicious reign and am in the quiet possession of the presidential mansion."

This is a 24-year-old woman. What should we learn from this quote about her?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: She sees herself as queen of the land, OK. She had spent some time in Europe after she had very notoriously posed for an engraving where she was advertising a product, a store actually, and that's something that respectable women did not do during that period so her parents had taken -- she and her sister to Europe where they were introduced at the -- the Court of Louis Philippe of France and she admired how the Queen received her guest. And it was on -- she was seated of course and on a bit of a pedestal and so Julia decided to do the same thing for a time.

But she saw it very much as she was the first lady of the land and she was going to make the most of it.

SUSAN SWAIN: From a family perspective, President Pondering (ph) asked, "Did John Tyler have children older than his second wife, Julia?"

TAYLOR STOERMER: Yes, his oldest daughter was several years older than Julia.

SUSAN SWAIN: And what was the family reaction?

TAYLOR STOERMER: The family reaction was -- as Dr. Medford pointed out, it was -- at first, it was -- among the daughters, it was very negative and very virulent that it took -- as she said, Letitia never reconciled to it. Lizzie, it was three months before she even acknowledged that the marriage had taken place. For the youngest daughter, that she eventually came around, the oldest daughter came around,.

But the sons who were already familiar enough with Julia that they were -- that they were OK with it by then.

SUSAN SWAIN: But reading that quote, do we have the sense that this was a young woman with great aspirations or was this really a love match?

TAYLOR STOERMER: I think that there's probably a little bit of both and that. (inaudible) to divide it out mainly because the correspondence that exists between them and whatever happened in terms of their portrait, we know that John's head-over-heels for her and we know that he's writing Shakespearian sonnets to her. We know he's engaging in that kind of -- in that kind of very cavalieresque way of -- way of courting her.

With her, the -- it depends on who you believe in terms of what her goals are. In the end, she ends up being his biggest supporter and biggest defender and if it -- and thanks to some very timely advice from her mother, was able to really put that -- was really able to put that in action.

SUSAN SWAIN: Next is a question from Claire (ph) in Owings Mills, Maryland.

Hi, Claire (ph).

QUESTION: Hi. I just wanted to say that a few years ago, a couple of us went to the Sherwood Plantation and Tyler's grandson was then and he spoke to us for about an hour. He was very gracious.

And I wonder if you could just discuss a little bit about their connection with William and Mary.

Thank you.

TAYLOR STOERMER: Wow, their connection with William and Mary goes back to the very beginning. You cannot separate William and Mary from the Tyler family at all. Even to the -- even to the present day, the Tylers go there.

Harrison's, you know, father Lyon (ph) Gardiner Tyler who was president of William and Mary, his father John Tyler had obviously gone -- the president had gone to William and Mary and had been chancellor of William and Mary, his father John had gone to -- had gone to William and Mary and -- and the place is as tied with the Tylers as the University of Virginia is tied with Thomas Jefferson.

SUSAN SWAIN: Another quote, which may hit some indication of the match between the Tylers. This is Julia writing about the president again in a letter to her mother, "Really, do you think there was ever a man so equal to any emergency? It is a sort of inspiration for his ideas are expressed at the moment of any emergency with perfect fluency and effect."

(LAUGHTER)

SUSAN SWAIN: A question from Rachel Davidson Schmoyer (ph). "How did Julia Gardiner, a Northerner, feel about becoming a slave-owner upon her marriage to John Tyler?"

TAYLOR STOERMER: That's an easy one. She comes from a family of slave-owners. New York does not abolish slavery until 1817, the Gardiners owned slaves, there are slaves at -- there are slaves at Gardiner's Island when -- that are owned by her family when she's born in 1820. She's as much born into the slave culture as anybody living in the Tidewater.

SUSAN SWAIN: Were there slaves in the White House in 1840?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: There must have been. The Tylers would have brought enslaved people with them and we know that when the Peacemaker -- the gun blew up on the Princeton, one of the enslaved men owned by Tyler was not killed and so clearly he had some of his enslaved people there in the White House with him.

SUSAN SWAIN: Now you talked earlier about Julia Tyler having done this advertisement, she earned the moniker, the Rose of Long Island.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Um-hum.

SUSAN SWAIN: And she brought that sense -- the sensibility to her job, her eight months as the first lady. It is written in some books that she actually had the services of what was -- what would be thought of is a press agent.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Yes.

TAYLOR STOERMER: She is the Hannah -- Hannah August of...

(LAUGHTER)

TAYLOR STOERMER: ... of the 1840s.

SUSAN SWAIN: The president himself didn't have a press...

TAYLOR STOERMER: No. No, not at all.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: She loved publicity.

TAYLOR STOERMER: Yeah.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: She -- the more notorious, the better. She made it a point of cultivating the friendship of a reporter and she would report what was happening in the White House in terms of the social events and he gave her a lot of personal attention in the articles that he wrote about her.

So she was out there in a way that, as I indicated before, respectable women did not do. But this is a new era. I mean, think -- this is the time when the women's movement is under way and interestingly enough, you know, someone like Julia Tyler sort of fits in, to a certain extent. She's very conservative in some ways. But in terms of breaking through the traditional way that a woman should behave, she's doing it in a way that other women are not at that time.

SUSAN SWAIN: Well, this series is called "Influence and Image," so let's spend a few minutes on this image question with Julia Tyler.

In addition to having loving publicity, as you describe her, and having someone helping her with her press, she had these young women who travelled with her. They became known as the "Vestal Virgins."

Who were they? How is she using them?

TAYLOR STOERMER: Well, it seems that what she did was develop her own court and perhaps it was my own belief but the notion that a first lady could not possibly be seen alone, that there is -- that she is representing -- and this is an interesting point about the development of the institution -- that she's representing something much bigger.

And so she had these young women who were joining her. They would call them the "Vestal Virgins." They will call them a number of different things depending upon which newspaper you were reading. But that she really believed that she was representing something much bigger than just being the wife of the president and to do that, it requires display, it requires a very conscious shaping of image as an element of political communication, which gets back to the point you were just making.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: (inaudible) she receives her guests surrounded by these women all dressed in white.

SUSAN SWAIN: And what was the public reaction to this? Did they love it or criticized it?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: You know, she seemed to be able to do no wrong. I mean, she had her critics but a lot of people loved her, especially men.

SUSAN SWAIN: She also brought dancing to the White House.

TAYLOR STOERMER: Right. She brought -- she brought the Waltz, she brought the Polka, she brought a number of things to -- to the White House. But -- but I think that when you're starting -- you're starting to get into the perceptions of that. I mean, it does work both ways that -- especially with the growth of the abolitionist press, that the abolitionist press starts to see these kind of things that Julia is doing in the White House, this level of extravagance as being yet another example of the corruption of the slave party. How -- particularly in -- during a distressed economic period, how could they possibly be doing that?

The only way they could be doing that is because they are gathering all of their wealth and benefits from the fact that they own other people. So -- so the -- in terms of a growth of that abolitionist press and the abolitionists send people just to keep an eye on the Tyler White House and report back on things like this, that what Julia is doing is in fact, in some quarters, very detrimental to that broader image while in other quarters, you know, it's very beneficial to supporting the idea of the imperial presidency.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: (inaudible) a certain extent that she redeems herself when she responds to the Duchess of Sutherland who had criticized slavery at America and she writes a letter back and says pretty much, you need to take care of business at home. You've got people from the lower classes there who were starving. And so she doesn't say slavery is right but she does imply that slavery's not as bad as what's happening.

SUSAN SWAIN: Joe is in Palmerton, Pennsylvania. You're on for a panel.

Go ahead please.

MALE: Hi, I love your series.

SUSAN SWAIN: What's your question?

MALE: I read somewhere that John Tyler played the violin.

And did any of his wives play any musical instrument?

SUSAN SWAIN: Thank you. Do we know?

TAYLOR STOERMER: I haven't the faintest clue. I'd be certainly -- he certainly -- but John Tyler certainly played the violin and if you go to Sherwood Forest, you can see the violin.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: And Julia played the guitar.

TAYLOR STOERMER: Oh, she played the guitar.

SUSAN SWAIN: Well, speaking of music and image-making, it said that she was the one who had the idea of "Hail to the Chief" being played whenever the president entered a room.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: That may have been Mrs. Polk. I...

(CROSSTALK)

SUSAN SWAIN: Is that right?

(CROSSTALK)

SUSAN SWAIN: No evidence on that...

(CROSSTALK)

(LAUGHTER)

SUSAN SWAIN: (inaudible) in advance here.

And she was, obviously from the photographs of her, just rather fashion-conscious and wore beautiful outfits.

Did she become a trendsetter for women at that time?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: I don't know.

SUSAN SWAIN: Was it -- had it become the point, do we know, where women were beginning to watch what the first lady wore and imitate these things?

TAYLOR STOERMER: Well, I think that this gets into the development of mass communication of the period and really what you're able to do in terms of emulating dress, that while engravings are certainly appearing in more and more newspapers, you're still relying mainly on the written word in order to be able to get across the impression of any kind -- of any kind of clothing. So in a particular way, you might be able to set a trend if she's wearing veil or Dolly Madison (inaudible) or something like that.

But for the most part, it's not until much later when there are many more images that are able to show up in a more sophisticated, technologically speaking, American press that you're able to get to the point where you have trends that can be identified in order to -- in order to move on.

SUSAN SWAIN: Julia Tyler was also very political and interested in her husband's political career and we move on to the influence part of her role as first lady, again eight short months that she was in this role. She was very much involved in a major policy issue that we've talked about or referenced already and that's the annexation of Texas.

We return now to Sherwood Forest for Panie Tyler (ph), the spouse of the president's grandson, talks about Julia's lobbying for this policy.

Let listen.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

PANIE TYLER (ph): And she lobbied politically, phenomenally, oh my dear for her husband. She had soirees at the White House to lobby.

Tyler was immensely dedicated to the concept of the annexation of Texas to the Union. And during that period, she was able to sway John C. Calhoun, who is a kinsman of my mother's, from South Carolina and she was able to sway John C. Calhoun to vote for the annexation of Texas and she

worked on Henry Clay but I don't know whether she really was successful and I -- but she took Henry Clay out to dinner and this is a woman without a chaperone, a president's wife, alone having dinner with Henry Clay and she didn't mind at all

And she wrote her mother a letter which I think is priceless. She says "Mother, Mr. Clay was a little insulting. When I told him that my husband wanted him to vote for the annexation of Texas, he said to me 'I am right, Texas should not be annexed to the Union and Mrs. Tyler, I want you to know that I'd rather be right than be president.' And I replied, 'My dear sir, my husband is both.' I truly think that the reply is almost better than the statement from Clay which we hear so frequently."

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SUSAN SWAIN: How significant was Julia Tyler's role in the ultimate decision to annex Texas?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Well, you know, she's keeping tabs of where people stand because she is going to Congress, she's listening to debates. She's trying to twist the arms.

I don't think she is that important to it. She is representing her husband's interest certainly. She supports that but whether or not she has influence over any particular Congressman, I am not so sure about that.

SUSAN SWAIN: Do you have an opinion about that?

TAYLOR STOERMER: Well, she certainly believes she has a lot of influence. I mean I am with Dr. Medford in thinking that her -- there are much more complicated balls in the political air over the Texas annexation issue than anything that Julia Gardiner Tyler is going to solve, especially in those months after the election and people know that James Polk is going to be the next president.

The treaty to annex -- the treaty to annex Texas had already been defeated by the Senate and they have to come up with a new, perhaps not terribly constitutional way of trying to accomplish this if they're going to accomplish it at all. And so they do have to go through these machinations of the joint resolutions for December for about 1844 but that involves much broader political questions in terms of where people are from -- in this political realignment of America that is going on at the time.

There's -- you're -- the Whigs are breaking down, the, you know -- obviously the Republicans are long broken down, there're the anti-Jacksonians and so -- but she firmly believes that she is responsible. John Tyler believes that she is responsible when on March 1, 1845 he signs the joint resolution that annexes Texas, he gives her the pen -- the gold pen that he signed it with and she put it around her neck and wore it as a trophy.

SUSAN SWAIN: Let's take our next question it is from Haren (ph) in Greenfield, California.

MALE: Yes, hello?

SUSAN SWAIN: You're on, welcome.

MALE: Yes my question is about John Tyler's second wife Julia. In the years after he left the presidency at the time when the Civil War began he was trying to stop Virginia from succeeding, but he was unsuccessful so later he supported the secession movement in Virginia and because of that he was considered a traitor and -- but he died in 1862.

And so my question is how did his wife Julia -- trying to redeem his name -- good name after he died in the years following the Civil War?

SUSAN SWAIN: Well actually we're going to let that story unfold over the next 15 or 20 minutes. Thank you for asking the question. That's where we're going to move on in just a couple of minutes.

Let me ask about, as you're talking about the evolving role of the first lady. We learned that Dolly Madison -- here, I'm bringing her name up yet again...

(LAUGHTER)

... practiced the art of parlor politics and she -- and that was emulated by her successors.

Is this the first instance of a first lady getting much more personally involved in a political issue that we know of?

TAYLOR STOERMER: Especially when you -- when you're talking about a main matter of public legislation on a public policy, I think that it's tough to find another first lady who is so overtly engaged in a kind of effort whether it's -- whether that level of influence is successful or is meaningful or not, she is certainly being out there actively supporting her husband's position on annexation.

She is talking everybody she can about it, she is writing a great deal about it, she is holding all of the social events at the White House in order to influence that piece of legislation. So if we're talking about a first lady that's being involved in a matter of national public policy and being involved explicitly so, I think that maybe you can peg that to Julia Tyler.

SUSAN SWAIN: Well, here's a question about first ladies and their perceived influence. Jennifer Sherman (ph) asked on Twitter, "FLOTUS Tyler -- and FLOTUS, for those of you who haven't gotten to Washington (inaudible) first lady of the United States. That's kind of from the Secret Service lingo I think -- believe she had a lot of influence and rightly so. Based on the first lady seen thus far, do you think they all felt this way, that they were influential women as spouses of the presidential husbands?"

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: I am not so sure that all of them wanted to be. That's the first thing. She's perhaps the first who really wants to get involved in that way. The other women I think are willing to simply play the traditional role, although, you know, you have some women who may be saying all kinds of things to their husbands. They're not making it public. We don't know exactly what they're saying to their husbands in terms of that influence.

But in terms of influencing outside of their own household, it's not likely that they even care to -- to serve in that capacity, most of them.

SUSAN SWAIN: Next -- excuse me. Next is a question from Linda (ph) -- is it Speero (ph) or Spyro (ph), Oklahoma?

QUESTION: It's Spyro.

SUSAN SWAIN: Welcome.

QUESTION: Good evening.

I would like to know, how does it affect his relationship with Julia and their marriage with, you know, their children from Letitia? How did the relationship (inaudible)?

Thank you for taking my call.

SUSAN SWAIN: Thanks very much.

You hit upon that earlier but did the criticism from the daughters affect their marriage? I think that's the question.

TAYLOR STOERMER: No. No, there's no evidence that (inaudible) and in fact because the daughters came around relatively soon except again for Letitia, they really became a very big, fairly close-knit family all gathered there, for the most part, at Sherwood Forest.

The Civil War does a lot of that in bringing them more close together because -- because the members of the family that are cast in other parts like her son, Robert, who is in Philadelphia, they all have to come back to Sherwood Forest. But they do see -- start to see Julia not necessarily as a stepmother but they refer to her -- some of them refer to her as a sister and they certainly come to love her and appreciate her and accept her into the family as such so that her children and -- and Letitia's children, although they're considerable age difference, they do end up -- come -- more than reconcile, they become very, very close.

SUSAN SWAIN: You spoke to us earlier of Whig party politics. John Tyler was castigated by the Whigs, essentially thrown out of the party for some of his positions. So he was a man without -- a president without a party...

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Absolutely.

SUSAN SWAIN: ... when the next election came around in 1844 so no chance of him being nominated.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Especially since he had alienated the other party as well...

(LAUGHTER)

... so there was no one there to really support him.

SUSAN SWAIN: It was certain to be a one-term presidency.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Absolutely.

SUSAN SWAIN: And with his loss then, how did the Tylers recognize their departure from Washington?

TAYLOR STOERMER: With parties, of course, and champagne.

(LAUGHTER)

TAYLOR STOERMER: The Tylers -- the last two weeks of the Tyler -- of the Tyler presidency is really nothing but Julia Gardiner Tyler at her -- Julia Gardiner Tyler at her absolute extravagant best. They start off with a party for like 3,000 people. Two weeks later, they have a party to celebrate James Knox Polk and the annexation of Texas and John Tyler then says you can no longer say that I'm a man without a party.

(LAUGHTER)

SUSAN SWAIN: And they returned to Sherwood Forest. We're going to see a little bit of their life there next -- before we do that, let's take a question from Robin in Ormond Beach, Florida.

Hi, Robin.

FEMALE: Hi there.

I'm following along at home with my first lady flashcards and I have a question with regard to fashion. Was the (inaudible) headdress still prevalent in earlier portraits of first ladies with the -- the first lady Harrison, was that for matronly women first ladies or was that just personal preference?

And also for Taylor, when was the first -- when did the first president wear what we would regard as a modern necktie? What year?

Thank you.

SUSAN SWAIN: Thank you.

TAYLOR STOERMER: The development of the -- of the modern necktie from the cravat, I think you're starting to get to -- you're starting to get well into the late 19th -- 19th century by the time you're seeing something like that. The way that -- the way of the fashion of presidents and (inaudible) shock (inaudible) historian friends by going into this subject.

But the way that that -- that that develops over time is really interesting in the 1820s and 1830s after James Monroe leaves the White House. James Monroe was the last of the folks who were sort of holding on to the 18th century way of dressing. And so you're able to see much more modern dress after -- much more modern dress progressively after that.

SUSAN SWAIN: On the women's side of the fashion, question, Edna Medford, we saw Rachel Jackson also wearing the sort of head -- the bonnet as we did with Anna Harrison, was that city versus country, regional or were time's changing...

(CROSSTALK)

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: That may have something to do with it.

But when you see with Julia Tyler, something very different, you see the beads in her hair. She has feathers in her hair from time to time so she dresses very differently.

So it's probably more cosmopolitan with some of the first ladies because of the urban influence and age too. I think age does have something to do with it.

SUSAN SWAIN: Anna Harrison was in her mid to late 60s.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Um-hum.

SUSAN SWAIN: And Julia Tyler, 24 years old when she came into the job so brought young sensibility with her.

Well, they left Washington in 1845 and returned to their home in the Virginia Tidewater area, the Sherwood Forest. By the way, how did it get its name?

TAYLOR STOERMER: It got its name because during one of -- during one of John Tyler's breaks with the Whigs, he was referred to as Robin Hood. And so he embraced that and therefore called -- called their home Sherwood Forest and Julia embraced it too.

When she got there, she basically gave uniforms and -- she developed new (inaudible) but gave new uniforms to the enslaved men who were there -- who rode their river boat. And so she had bow and arrows as a part of their -- as a part (inaudible) -- I mean, sewn on the collar as a part of their uniforms.

SUSAN SWAIN: Well, let's return to Sherwood Forest and learn more about what the Tyler's life was like after the White House.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

FEMALE: The Tylers -- John Tyler was born in Charles City County at Greenway and he purchased this house at the end of his presidential term.

He came down here once before he retired from the presidency, brought with him Julia Gardiner, they were married. She said, "The hand of God and nature have been kind to my Sherwood Forest, but I can improve upon it," which she did.

She had liquor around the ceilings. She had the moldings imported from Italy. She had the mantle pieces brought in from Italy and the knocker on the front door has -- well, you have to look hard to see it. It has Sherwood Forest on it but it's been meticulously polished through the years and that was one of her contributions to the house.

Julia and her mother were very, very close and we are exceedingly fortunate to have many letters written between Julia and her mother from this plantation in the hot summer weather. This house is only one room wide because you want the breezes to go from the north to the south and from the south to the north. And so they would sit in the hall quite frequently and she sat in the open doorway that led to the south porch and wrote letters to her mother and quite frequently she commented on the president who keep his feet on the banister and would read his newspaper and throw it on the floor.

In the gray room is a table and it's the table upon which we are told John Tyler served Julia Tyler breakfast in her bedroom after he had been around the house.

After his horseback ride, he will go to that table and have breakfast with his wife, which he personally would carry in on a tray, for she was still in bed. And also her mother writes and says I understand from other people that visit you that you sleep until 9 o'clock in the morning and that the president brings you breakfast in bed and she says please do not take advantage of an elderly gentleman who dotes upon you.

In the afternoons, Julia writes to her mother frequently what she is doing on this plantation. She records almost every purchase of furniture in the house. Her brothers David and Alexander who were students at Princeton became upon the suggestion of Mrs. Gardiner her buying agents. For instance the mirror was ordered from a store called Baudans and when it comes, she is very distressed because the edges of it cover at the bottom the edge of the mirror face -- of the window facing.

Her mother writes her back and says, "Don't be so picky on my minutia". She did love to entertain and we do have the record of ball, which she had in honor of her sister Margaret who came here very frequently and the portrait here is a portrait of Julia and Margaret, she was two years younger than Margaret and this portrait was painted obviously to represent Gardiner's Island because you can see the water in the background and they were very, very young when the portrait was done.

Anyway the ball that she had for Margaret started at 9 o'clock and then she says they danced the Virginia Rail and the Waltz until the sun rose and the finest champagne flowed unceasingly. Among one thing that Julia did here to -- for entertainment is they allowed all the house servants' children to

play continuously with the children of the big house. The letters Julia Tyler speaks of her children playing with the children in the yard and she speaks of the dancing with the children in the yard.

The supervision of the house servants and there were many. There were a total of almost 90 slaves, a vacillating number between 61 and 92 on the plantation so the house servants, I think there were 13 house servants here. and they were totally her supervision as was the care -- the medical care of the other servants in the plantation.

They were happy in this household and she loved it. She refers to the melody of his voice. She always refers to his intelligence. She had a wonderful time here.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SUSAN SWAIN: And also these newlyweds then commenced raising that large family that we talked about for seven children that were born to the Tylers before he died in 1862. Is that when he passed?

TAYLOR STOERMER: (inaudible)

SUSAN SWAIN: So a question, Panie (ph) Tyler refers to the slavery issue, which we've come back to throughout the program and the country itself is marching inexorably toward the Civil War. What was John Tyler's post White House role in that momentous period of time?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Well in 1861, there was an attempt to stay secession and John Tyler was very instrumental in that particular -- that last ditch effort to do that. There was a peace conference held in Washington and he was very much -- in February of 1861 and he was very much a part of that.

But once that failed he decided to back the Confederacy, to back secession and so when he died, he had been elected to the Confederate Congress. He was very much a secessionist. And when he died, his coffin was covered with the Confederate flag and the North, the Union, did not acknowledge his having passed.

SUSAN SWAIN: So we have a former President of the United States who gets elected to the Confederate Congress. Put that into perspective.

TAYLOR STOERMER: It's really extraordinary and John Tyler, the previous caller, suggested that he really just try to stem secession. I think -- not (inaudible) sure how much his heart was in the Washington Peace Conference that met at -- in the old Willard Hotel especially after there was a meeting in the middle of conference with Abraham Lincoln which Abraham Lincoln would not back off from his pledge to halt the expansion of slavery. And as Dr. Medford said to me he is all in when it comes to the -- when it comes to secession and he's likening secession to 1776 that Virginia has finally recovered all of the sovereignty that it had yielded to the federal government in -- in the Constitution and so they're back in the state that they were in 1776 in order which they will achieve their independence.

But then Virginia for a brief period is again a sovereign independent state. He's instrumental in the negotiations that bring Virginia full bore into the Confederacy. And you know one of the interesting things about the Washington Peace Conference is that at that exact time that he is here in Washington, ostensibly trying to ward off civil war. His granddaughter Letitia is in Montgomery, Alabama dedicating the new capital of the confederacy by raising the new stars and bars over that building.

SUSAN SWAIN: We've been showing you some of Julia Tyler's letters and here is one that she wrote to her mother about the Civil War. She wrote, "The Southerners are warned completely

wrought up to it and will not be tampered with any longer. If such a thing should occur it will be more unfortunate for the North. Not a good predictor of what ultimately happened. Her husband died at 1862. Dave Murdock asks us how did the Civil War impact Julia's life especially after John died? So what happened to her after John died?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: She leaves and she goes to Staten Island to live with her mother and she spends the entire war there. I think she actually goes to Bermuda for.

(CROSSTALK)

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Yes, yes, so she is not at Sherwood Forest. And of course she is impacted financially by the war because she loses her enslaved laborers, first of all, and she doesn't really -- she returns there to try to get it into some kind of order, but she doesn't live there again, I don't believe. She spends the remaining years I believe in Richmond. She has rented a home there and she -- so she spends a lot of time in Richmond, but not in the county.

SUSAN SWAIN: And what is the public perception of her post-war?

TAYLOR STOERMER: Well in the South, quite good. In the North, not quite so good.

She is still referred to in the South as the "ex--presidentess" and something that she insists upon. John Tyler's memory is still revered in the South after the war as being somebody who is able to legitimize the cause of the Confederacy and Julia Gardiner Tyler certainly is contributing kind of this lost cause notion of something that she refers to as the holy Southern cause.

So she never -- there really isn't any kind of rehabilitation of her husband because in the south she does not feel like he needs to be rehabilitated except when it comes to getting her pension which is something she desperately needs. They have two homes, they have Sherwood Forest and they also have a summer home near Hampton, Virginia and they -- which actually is -- which goes through the same kind of damage that Sherwood Forest goes through.

She has to sell that property in order just to maintain Sherwood Forest, which again is mostly for her family to live in and she spends a lot of the time fighting for her pension, which she doesn't get until 1881 when she is awarded \$1,200 a year. But the main argument against it is that yes you may have been first lady but your husband actually became a traitor to the United States so there's no reason why we should ever honor that.

SUSAN SWAIN: On the phone with us right now is Christopher Lahey. He is an associate professor of history in New York and with his spouse is the co-editor of the Julia Gardiner Tyler papers.

Christopher Lahey, how voluminous are her papers and what is the broad scope of what we can learn about this woman and the White House from them?

CHRISTOPHER LAHEY, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Well, her papers are very voluminous. There are two major collections, one at the Sterling Library at Yale University and the other major collection at the College of William and Mary. And we can learn pretty much everything about her life from the time that she marries John Tyler in 1844 until just about the time that she dies in 1889. I mean these are very rich source that cover every aspect of her life and her children's lives.

SUSAN SWAIN: Now we've been spending in the past 45 minutes or so trying to paint a portrait of her. What would you like to add to that from your work with her papers?

CHRISTOPHER LAHEY: Well, you know, I think that history tends to remember Julia for the frivolity and for the fact that she was a very young first lady for eight months but I think that actually

obscures her true character, I mean remember she lived 27 years after her husband died so she had another life -- literally another life after her husband passed away in 1862 and her papers reveal her to be a very strong woman, a practical woman, a very serious, self-possessed, self-assured, adaptable and very devoted to her family. She could be quite tenacious about her family particularly her children if she felt their interests were being threatened.

SUSAN SWAIN: And what is happening with these papers? Is there a contemporary interest beyond your own scholarship? Talk to us about the historical interest in Julia Tyler.

CHRISTOPHER LAHEY: Well the main problem with Julia's papers is that she has penmanship that only a mother could love and fortunately my wife has become very adept at reading and going through the work, going through the papers. They're very difficult to read, which I think is part of the reason why scholars have not really exploited them for the potential that they hold. I think our work hopefully will bring more of her actual experiences to life particularly the post presidential years and particularly the years after her husband passed away in 1862.

SUSAN SWAIN: How did you get interested?

CHRISTOPHER LAHEY: Well, I did my dissertation on John Tyler's pre-presidential career and I am currently at work on a manuscript -- a book manuscript doing John Tyler and it just seemed a natural fit, a natural progression from there. Once I got into the Julia Gardiner Tyler papers, I realized that I wasn't very good at reading them because of the penmanship and my wife very courageously, I think, dove into them and is transcribing them for me so that I can do my work on the writing end.

SUSAN SWAIN: If someone is interested in learning more are any of the papers published online that they can read some of the letters for themselves?

CHRISTOPHER LAHEY: Yes I think there are some online. They're again very difficult to read. She had a tendency to write -- she would write going left to right and then she would turn the paper and go left to right upside down so there's a very difficult process trying to read these so I don't know exactly if there are any online how easy that would be for a researcher.

SUSAN SWAIN: Well, thank you for telling us about your scholarship and we look forward as your work progresses to learning more about this period of American history through the writings of Julia Tyler. Thanks for your time.

CHRISTOPHER LAHEY: Thank you very much.

SUSAN SWAIN: We have just a few minutes left, I want to get a couple more calls in. Next one is a call from Bill in Fishers, Indiana.

Hi Bill.

MALE: Hi Susan.

Enjoying your show very much and enjoying your two guests as well very much. I was wondering, was Julia a religious person and I was wondering about her conversion to Catholicism and how that influenced her later life.

Thank you.

SUSAN SWAIN: Do you know?

TAYLOR STOERMER: I think I'll leave Julia (inaudible).

SUSAN SWAIN: OK, was she religious, do you know?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Not really, but she does join the Catholic Church later in life and I am not sure why she actually does that. But perhaps the church gains more by that than she does because there's always been that tension between Protestants and Catholics in this country even though we don't have an official religion. It -- most people think of America as being a Protestant place, but the fact that you did have a former first lady joining the Catholic Church in such a public way I think sort of elevated the status of Catholicism a little bit.

SUSAN SWAIN: And when in her life did she do this?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: This was, I think -- I know it was later in life, yeah, much later. A few years before she died I believe.

TAYLOR STOERMER: And John Tyler is not especially religious guy even by, you know, sort of by that, you know, the physical standards of the day. Letitia was a very strong Episcopalian, his first wife, and he really admired the strength of her faith in her. But John Tyler was more of a Jeffersonian Epicurean I think than he was anything else.

SUSAN SWAIN: Fred is watching us in San Francisco and you're on now Fred.

MALE: Yes, hi, thank you. I was -- the three most powerful men in Washington at the time were of course Clay, Webster and Calhoun and I was wondering if there were any -- with even Letitia, but Julia more importantly what was her attitude towards those three men?

SUSAN SWAIN: Thank you.

Edna Medford?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: She certainly would have been very comfortable of Calhoun. Not so much Clay even though Tyler had supported Clay at one point. But as Tyler became more separated from the Whig Party then she would have gone in that direction as well. Webster, I am not so sure but certainly Calhoun would have been the person that she would have been closest to in terms of politically.

TAYLOR STOERMER: At Webster had stuck within the Tyler's cabinet longer than any of the other original members of the Harrison cabinet. But I think you're absolutely right, I think it does come down to where really were they when in terms of John Tyler's politics as for exactly how she felt.

SUSAN SWAIN: Margaret's watching us in Fort River, New Jersey. Hey, Margaret. You're on the air.

FEMALE: Yes, hello, I am enjoying this very much. I was wondering what president Tyler died from. It's -- I read that he was elected a Virginia representative to the Confederate Congress and that when he was attending the secession, he died just a few minutes after midnight in 1862 and he was 71 years old. And also how old was he when he fathered his last child?

SUSAN SWAIN: All right, this question's Taylor Stoermer. Do you know the answer to?

TAYLOR STOERMER: Well, I mean, he was 71. He did not -- he was never sworn in as a member of the Confederate Congress. It was just about (inaudible) so he was in Richmond for that secession and since it was early in 62, he had -- from what we know he had caught a cold and died at that age. The last trial that they had I think that he was 68.

SUSAN SWAIN: Yes, because she was two years old when he died.

TAYLOR STOERMER: Because she was two years old when he died, yeah.

SUSAN SWAIN: Yes. Next is a question from Darla (ph) in Austin, Texas. We have a Texan after this big history lesson and your state's annexation. What's your question for us?

QUESTION: My question is was the controversy over the annexation of Texas only about slavery or where there any other consideration such as considerations about the location and geography of Texas being so close to Mexico?

SUSAN SWAIN: Thank you so much, Edna Medford.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: It was all about slavery in the 1840s and the 1850s. you can't really separate the whole struggle over the expansion of slavery into the West. It's about Texas, it's about Kansas later on, it's slavery front and center.

SUSAN SWAIN: Now we have about three to four minutes left and as we close out our discussion here, we had learned that Julia Tyler, as a very young woman, was very adept at publicity and creating an image for herself. Gary Robinson (ph) asked, "How did the United States (inaudible) death or had she become very private and largely forgotten by them"? Did she call upon those proliferation skills and her -- to ensure her legacy?

TAYLOR STOERMER: Not really by the end of her life. She died in 1889 and obviously there are a lot of other things going on in the country by then. She had been largely focusing on her family, focusing on her -- focusing on maybe a personal legacy in that sense and maintaining what the family could hold on to, something like Sherwood Forest, so they can pass that on.

So in terms of the broader kind of working on that image later on in her life, so much of her energy was devoted to the pension fight, was devoted to other things that I think that was far from her mind by then.

SUSAN SWAIN: Well as we close out here, we've talked about a few things she did to advance the role of first lady in this country. How should we remember her historically?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: At the vivacious person she was, quite a bit ambitious and I think that her story conveys the possibilities for first ladies. Not all of them pursued her path, but she was able to do some things that were significant.

SUSAN SWAIN: And what would you say about that question. What's her legacy?

TAYLOR STOERMER: I say the jury's still out. I think that one of the great things about this particular series is helping us re-evaluate what we mean by the first lady by the institution of the first lady as a part of the presidency itself and so you can see again the possibilities of a woman in that position.

But on the other hand, you can also see perhaps some of the limitations as with Letitia, as with the number of the women that we talked about throughout this program. And so I think maybe by the end of this series we can get back together again and talk about well what have we learned about what is the first lady and therefore kind of see what Julia Tyler's legacy really is.

SUSAN SWAIN: And what should we think about John Tyler's presidency? What was his contribution to American...

(CROSSTALK)

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD: Oh my God. You know I cannot change my opinion of him, I -- he is a person who turned his back on his own party, OK. That's one thing. He supported a cause that actually let -- was creating serious issues for a whole group of people, a whole race of people. He was more than willing to perpetuate slavery forever if possible. And so I can't separate his legacy from that.

SUSAN SWAIN: And next week we will learn about the life of his successor in the White House, James K. Polk, and we look forward to you being involved with that when we do that.

Let me say thank you at this point to our two guests on the Harrison and Tyler presidencies, Edna Greene Medford to Howard University here in Washington D.C. which she chairs the history department and Taylor Stoermer who is the historian for Colonial Williamsburg. Thanks to both of you.

This series is produced in cooperation with the White House Historical Association and we thank them for their help. Thanks for being with us.

Operator: Next Monday night a well--educated woman for the 1800s. We'll trace the life and influence of Sarah Polk on her husband's career as she helps write James Polk's speeches and lobbies members of Congress, then Margaret Taylor who was as much a soldier as I was according to President Zachary Taylor after they spent years together at military outpost. Margaret wanted nothing to do with politics and reportedly prayed for her husband's defeat in the 1848 presidential race and although he wins the election he dies 16 months after taking office.

His vice president Millard Fillmore assumes the presidency and Abigail Fillmore becomes first lady. A teacher in New York State she was the first first lady to have a job before entering the White House, turning it into a cultural center for the arts while lobbying for funds to establish the first ever White House Library.

First Ladies: Influence and Image, live next Monday night at 9 Eastern on C-SPAN and C-SPAN3 as well as C-SPAN Radio and C-SPAN.org and our website has more about the First Ladies including a special section "Welcome to the White House" produced by our partner the White House Historical Association which chronicles life in the executive mansion during the tenure of each of the First Ladies and with the association we're offering a special edition of the book "First Ladies of the United States of America" presenting a biography and portrait of each First lady, comments from noted historians and thoughts from Michelle Obama on the role of First Ladies throughout history, now available for the discounted price of \$12.95 plus shipping at C-SPAN.org/products.

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