

John Tyler
10th President

John Tyler



Terms: 1841-1845

Political Party: Whig

First Lady: Letitia Christian Tyler, Julia Gardiner Tyler

Vice President: None

Overview

Born: March 29, 1790, in Greenway, Virginia... Following the sudden death of [William Henry Harrison](#) <www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-wharrison/>, Vice President John Tyler assumed the presidency. "His Accidency" quickly ran afoul of his own party; they repudiated him, and some Whigs in Congress attempted to impeach him. His entire cabinet, except Secretary of State Daniel Webster, resigned. A Southern states' rights advocate, he died during the [Civil War](#) <www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/lincolns/> while serving in the Confederate Congress... Died: January 18, 1862.

The Era

- Slaves take over the U.S.S. *Creole*, en route to Louisiana, kill one owner and sail to the Bahamas where they can live in freedom (1841)
- The first state fair is held in Syracuse, New York (1841)
- The word "dinosaur" is coined (1842)
- The Young Men's Christian Association is founded (1844)
- Charles Darwin publishes *Voyage of the Beagle* (1845)

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Domestic Policy

Although nominally of the same party as Congress, Tyler's administration was marked by its antagonism with legislators. Tyler vetoed the Whig bills to recreate a national bank on the grounds that states should have the right to refuse such an institution. The Whigs dropped the president from their party and almost all of Tyler's cabinet resigned. After he vetoed a tariff bill, the House of Representatives considered the first impeachment resolution against a president in American history. A committee headed by former president [John Quincy Adams](#) <www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-jqadams/> concluded that Tyler had misused the veto, but the impeachment resolution did not pass. On Tyler's last day in office, Congress overrode the presidential veto of a minor funding bill -- the first veto to be overridden.

Foreign Affairs

Tyler's major foreign policy achievement was the Webster-Ashburton Treaty with Great Britain. Without a proper demarcation between the United States and British North America (later Canada), skirmishes had broken out along the Maine-New Brunswick line. British Foreign Secretary Lord Ashburton and Daniel Webster worked out the details of a border that bisected the Great Lakes and granted open navigation on those waters to both countries. Elsewhere, Tyler opened diplomatic relations with China, and soured relations with Mexico following the annexation of Texas in 1845.

“Our fathers created -- we have to preserve. They built up through their wisdom and patriotism monuments which have eternalized their causes.”

— John Tyler, 1861

Presidential Politics

Americans who voted for "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too" were suddenly left with just "Tyler Too" in the White House. Tyler's firm conviction that Harrison's death made him the president in every sense of the word set a precedent that provided for smooth transitions for other sitting vice presidents, from [Millard Fillmore](#)

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<www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-fillmore/>
to [Lyndon Johnson](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-lbjohnson/) <www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-lbjohnson/> (letters addressed to "Acting President Tyler" were returned, unopened). Tyler's social life provoked scandal -- just months after the death of his first wife, he married Julia Gardiner, who at 22 was 30 years his junior and younger than some of his children. The marriage prospered, and it was Julia who introduced the custom of playing "Hail to the Chief" upon the arrival of the president.

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