



Letitia Christian Tyler

November 12, 1790 - September 10, 1842

Washington, District of Columbia

Letitia Christian Tyler, First Lady of the United States and wife of President John Tyler, died in the White House on September 10, 1842. She was fifty-one. Family accounts say she held a damask rose; the quieter fact is that she had been an invalid for years after a stroke, and the Executive Mansion became the place she ended rather than the stage she commanded.

Born at Cedar Grove plantation in New Kent County, Virginia, on November 12, 1790, she married John Tyler in 1813 and managed a growing household through his rise from state politics to the vice presidency and, after William Henry Harrison's death, the presidency. She preferred private rooms to levees. Daughter-in-law Priscilla Cooper Tyler often stood in for public duties while Letitia kept the domestic order of a Virginia household transplanted to Pennsylvania Avenue.

She was the first wife of a sitting president to die in the White House, and one of the youngest First Ladies to die in office. The household mourned in a capital that still treated the president's family as an extension of Southern gentry manners. Her body was taken back to Virginia for burial at her birthplace.

She left eight surviving children and a husband who would remarry within a year. The brief official notices of 1842 barely sketched her; the longer memory is of a First Lady who occupied the office as a private duty rather than a public performance.

Services

Died in the White House, Washington, D.C., on September 10, 1842. Buried at Cedar Grove, New Kent County, Virginia.

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