

John Payne Todd (1792 – 17 Jan 1852)

Todd. In this city on the morning of the 17th instant, John Payne Todd, Esq., in the 61st year of his age.

"Ladies of the White House" by Laura Carter Holloway

"Paine was notoriously a bad character. His character was the sorrow of his mother's life. Mr.

THE INCOMPARABLE DOLLEY



Courtesy of Clark, Life and Letters
John Payne Todd, son of Dolley Payne Todd and her first husband, John Todd, Jr.

Madison, during his lifetime, bore with him like a father and paid many of his debts, but he was an incorrigible spend thrift. His heartless unprincipled conduct embittered the last years of his mothers life and no doubt shortened it."

He involved his mother in serious financial troubles which left her destitute in the last years of her life. Congress, who bought Pres. Madison's papers from Mrs. Madison (and thus removed her debts and left her with a small income), was well aware of Todd's reputation and ensured that the payment for the papers was left in trust to Mrs. Madison, to ensure that her son could not touch the principal.

(Note: Son of Dolley Madison and Dr. John Todd, Jr. of Philadelphia died in the yellow fever epidemic of 1793.)

Mrs. James Madison, The Incomparable Dolley, by Ethel Stephens Arnett, Piedmont Press, Greensboro, North Carolina, 1972, p. 238

Very little is known of Payne's life from his birth until he was a young man. He is often mentioned in Dolley's letters as being near-by, but only a few details are given as to what he was doing. He was with his mother in 1794 when she married James Madison. Once when he was a boy in Washington, Dolley was greatly worried about his health and wrote to Anna about his continued weakness: "My prospects rise and fall to sadness as this precious child recovers or declines." In 1805 Dolley was concerned about enrolling him in Bishop John Carroll's school in Baltimore. Different biographers have place him in different institutions during his early school years, and Irving Brant in His James Madison wrote that Payne completed St. Mary's College in Baltimore where he "studied moral and natural philosophy and French under Father Dubourg." This same teacher at St. Mary's reported to Payne's parents that they had every reason to be please with their son's progress in his studies. Thus far, Dolley seemed happy with his advancement, for she wrote Anna on May 12, 1812:

Payne is in Baltimore yet, and as much admired and respected as you could wish. He writes me that Mrs. Patterson and Mrs. Bonaparte are very kind to him, and he is invited out all the time. We intend to send him in a few months to Princeton.

About the same time, Sally McKean, the Marchioness Carlos D'Yrujo, gave Dolley some interesting additional information on Payne:

Your son Payne has been twice to see me, but unfortunately I was out both times, the Marques saw him, and says he is a fine young man, grown so tall and handsome. I shall make an effort to find him today, and intend to ask him if he remembers that time when a little fellow he pulled off General Van Cortlandt's wig at the very moment he was making me a flourishing compliment.

For some unknown reason Dolley's hope for her son to enter Princeton did not materialize. Payne had assisted President Madison in his office in 1813 while Presidential Secretary Edward Coles was absent because of his illness. In the meantime, the War of 1812 was in full swing and the President was hoping to negotiate peace terms with the British through representatives he planned to send to Europe. With some secretarial experience to his credit, Payne Todd, now twenty-one, was appointed as one of Albert Gallatin's attaches for the mission; and the delegation sailed for Europe in the spring of 1813. At the invitation of the Czar of Russia, the Americans first went to St. Petersburg, but the British ...