



## The Diary of Bartleby the Scrivener, Vol. 1: The Dead Letter Years

by Dan Morey



**Editor's Note:** After *Bartleby the scrivener* was forcibly removed from my former law offices at No.— Wall Street, I discovered a small journal secreted beneath the floorboards where his desk had stood. Due to Bartleby's uncommunicative nature, I knew almost nothing of his personal life or his prior employment in the Dead Letter Office at Washington. So it was with great curiosity that I opened this private diary and began to read. The contents proved to be of such strange, sad interest, that I decided to reproduce them here, entirely unaltered, in hopes that you, the reader, might glean some understanding of the human condition from poor Bartleby's history.

### The Diary

*August 29, 1844*

President Tyler announced he's dropping out of the race today. Says he was surprised by the lack of support for his new party. Really? Surprised that no one wants to back the National Democratic Tyler Convention? A three-month-old agglomeration of turncoat Whigs and quasi-Democrats headed by a sitting President who was nearly impeached?

I can only hope this idiocy doesn't affect my job at the Dead Letter Office.

*September 4*

Had a date with Lydia from Sorting tonight. Took her to Olga's Tearoom for the folk dancing. Think it went well. Nice girl, Lydia, though I wish she'd do something with her hair. Haven't seen ringlets like that since '38.

*September 5*

Note from Lydia this morning. Apparently the date wasn't as successful as I thought. Says I need to

work on my conversation skills and get some sun. I responded tersely, advising her to consider a hairstyle from this decade.

*September 13*

President Tyler is really letting himself go. He's been in New York most of the month, drinking champagne by the case and taking his new wife around to disreputable saloons.

Life in the Dead Letter Office continues unchanged. Read a highly indecent billet-doux from Ohio today. It's unbelievable what some people will put in the mail.

*September 15*

Wound up behind Lydia in the pudding line at the cafeteria. Talk about awkward. When I complimented her new spaniel curls, she responded with sarcasm, saying she was awfully glad they were up to my standards.

*October 5*

Tyler actually deigned to spend a few hours in the White House this week, and (big surprise) he's still going on about annexing Texas. Why he wants those hicks in the Union, I'll never know. Their biggest hero wore a coonskin cap, for God's sake.

*October 14*

Spotted Mrs. Tyler on Pennsylvania Avenue this afternoon. I knew she was younger than the President, but Ye Gods, the girl is an infant! The old goat should be ashamed of himself.

*October 20*

Got a closer look at the First Lady today. Parts her hair in the middle and wears it close to her scalp. Very attractive. It's weird—I feel like I've seen her somewhere before.

*October 21*

Just remembered where I saw Mrs. Tyler. She was the girl posing with the mustachioed fop on that department store handbill. The "Rose of Long Island" ad. Boy, the President can really pick 'em.

*October 29*

Polk is ahead in the polls, which is worrying. I'm afraid if a Dem gets in, we Whigs will be out the door come inauguration time. Go Clay!

*November 1*

Voting starts today. Fingers crossed.

*November 10*

Read a hilarious dead letter this morning. Some chump writing to an obviously phony mail-order business (Fancy Man Catalogue Sales) wondering where his shipment of silk cravats is.

*November 20*

Voting continues. Somebody really needs to streamline the election process.

*December 1*

Voting is finally done, and now they're counting. Or maybe they were counting last week. Who can say? I work for the government and don't even know what's going on. Imagine how the general public feels.

December 4

Well, it's over. Polk won. Looks like it's bye-bye Bartleby.

Found a gold ring in an envelope from Connecticut today and took it straight to the pawnshop.

*December 8*

Tyler insists he will annex Texas before his term is up. Calls anyone who disagrees with him a "puling Whig licker."

*December 25*

Christmas. How dreary.

*December 26*

Slept in the vacant office on the supervisor's sofa last night. Surprisingly comfortable. Shaved in his sink and didn't clean up.

*January 1, 1845*

New Year's Day. Only two more months of employment—time to start raiding the stationery closet.

*January 15*

President Tyler is soused every day now, and still fixated on Texas. His Cabinet members have taken to playing badminton on the South Lawn during work hours, and the First Lady is thinking of getting back into advertising.

*February 2*

Felt kind of logy this morning, so I just sat there at my desk, staring at the wall. The supervisor asked me to burn some dead letters, and I told him I preferred not to. The look on his face was priceless.

*February 20*

Haven't done a lick of work all month. When somebody asks me to do something I just tell them I would prefer not to. And it actually works! Can't believe I never thought of this before.

*February 28*

Supervisor threatened to report me to the President for insubordination today. "What's he going to do?" I said. "Fire me?"

*March 1*

Put up some makeshift partitions around my desk. They seem to keep the supervisor away, and are actually quite nice to stare at.

*March 2*

Tyler got his Texas treaty through in the nick of time. Congratulations U.S.A., you're now the proud owner of a backwards, rube-infested wasteland.

*March 4*

Polk took office today, and I was officially relieved of my duties at the Dead Letter Office. Lydia is the only one in the department who was asked to stay on. Apparently the new President is a fan of goofy hairdos.

Probably should've been looking for a job these last three months, but what's the hurry? I'm really starting to enjoy this not-working thing. Plus, I snagged enough jewelry and banknotes from dead letters to keep me in ginger-nuts for years.