



Sally Hemings

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Sarah "Sally" Hemings (c. 1773 – 1835) was an enslaved woman of mixed race owned by President Thomas Jefferson. She is the mother of six fathered by him.,^[1] of whom four survived to adulthood;^[2] and were given freedom by Jefferson. Hemings was the youngest of six siblings by the widowed planter John Wayles and his mixed-race slave Betty Hemings; Sally and her siblings were three-quarters European and half-siblings of Jefferson's wife, Martha Wayles Skelton.^[3]

In 1787, Hemings, aged 14,^[1] accompanied Jefferson's youngest daughter Mary ("Polly") to London and then to Paris, where the widowed Jefferson, aged 44 at the time, was serving as the United States Minister to France. Hemings spent two years there. It is believed by most historians that Jefferson began a sexual relationship with Hemings either in France or soon after their return to Monticello.^[4] Hemings was a slave in Jefferson's house until his death.

The historical question of whether Jefferson was the father of Hemings' children is known as the Jefferson–Hemings controversy. Following renewed historic analysis in the late 20th century and a 1998 DNA study that found a match between the Jefferson male line and a descendant of Hemings' last son, Eston Hemings, there is a near-consensus among historians that the widower Jefferson fathered her son Eston Hemings and probably all her children.^[5] A small number of historians, however, still disagree.^[6]

Hemings' children lived in Jefferson's house as slaves and were trained as artisans. Jefferson freed all of Hemings' surviving children: Beverly, Harriet, Madison, and Eston, as they came of age (they were the only slave family freed by Jefferson). They were seven-eighths European in ancestry, and three of the four entered white society as adults. Descendants of those three identified as white.^{[7][8]} Hemings was "given her time", lived her last nine years freely with her two younger sons in Charlottesville, Virginia, and saw a grandchild born in the house her sons owned.^[9]

Sally Hemings

Born	Sarah Hemings c. 1773 Charles City County, Virginia Colony
Died	1835 (aged 61–62) Charlottesville, Virginia
Residence	Monticello
Known for	Slave and concubine to Thomas Jefferson
Children	Harriet Hemings, Beverly Hemings, Harriet Hemings (II), Madison Hemings, Eston Hemings
Parent(s)	Betty Hemings, John Wayles
Relatives	James Hemings, John Hemings, Mary Hemings, John Wayles Jefferson, Frederick Madison Roberts

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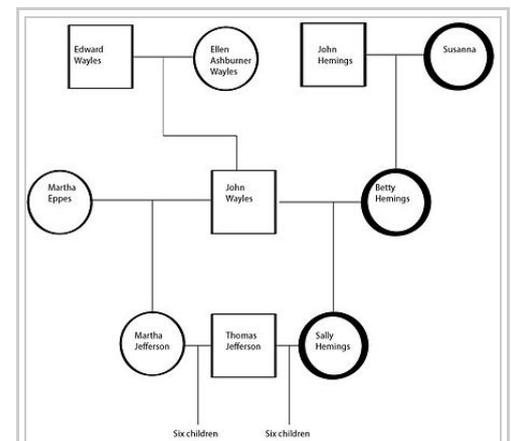
Early life

Sally Hemings was born about 1773 to Betty Hemings (1735–1807), a biracial slave. Her father was their master John Wayles (1715–1773). Her mother Betty was the daughter of Susanna, an enslaved African, and John Hemings, an English sea captain.^[10] Susanna and Betty Hemings were first held by Francis Eppes IV, where Susanna was referred to as Susanna Epps.^[11] John Hemings tried to buy them from Eppes, but the planter refused to give them up.^[10] The mother and daughter were inherited by Francis's daughter, Martha Eppes, who took them with her as personal servants upon her marriage to the planter John Wayles. His parents were Edward Wayles and Ellen Ashburner-Wayles, both of Lancaster, England.^[12]

After Martha's death,^[13] Wayles married and was widowed twice more.^[14] Several sources assert that the widower John Wayles took his slave Betty Hemings as a concubine and had six children by her during the last 12 years of his life; the youngest of these was Sally Hemings.^{[15][14]} They were half-siblings to his daughters by his wives; his first child, Martha Wayles (named after her mother, John Wayles's first wife), married the young planter Thomas Jefferson.^[16]

The biracial children of Betty Hemings by Wayles were three-quarters European in ancestry and very fair-skinned. (They had a white maternal grandfather and two white paternal grandparents.) Since 1662 in Virginia slave law, children born to enslaved mothers were considered slaves under the principle of *partus sequitur ventrem*. Elizabeth and her children, including Sally Hemings, and all their children, were legally slaves, although the fathers were the white masters and the children were majority-white in ancestry.^[17]

After Wayles died in 1773, his daughter Martha and Jefferson inherited the Hemings family among a total of 135 slaves from his estate, as well as 11,000 acres of land.^{[3][18]} The youngest Wayles-Hemings child was Sally, an infant that year and about 25 years younger than Martha. Scholars have noted that as the mixed-race Wayles-Hemings children grew up at Monticello, they were trained and given assignments as skilled artisans and domestic servants, at the top of the slave hierarchy. Betty Hemings' other children and their descendants, also mixed race, also had privileged assignments. None worked in the fields.^[19]



An incomplete family tree or pedigree showing Sally Hemings' parents and grandparents. Squares denote men and circles denote women. Bold strokes indicate slaves.

Hemingses in Paris

In 1784, the widower Thomas Jefferson was appointed the American envoy to France; he took his oldest daughter Martha (Patsy) with him to Paris, as well as some of his personal slaves. Among them was Sally's older brother James Hemings, who became trained as a chef in French cuisine.^[20] Jefferson left his two younger daughters in the care of friends in the US. After Lucy died of whooping cough in 1787, Jefferson sent for his surviving daughter, nine-year-old Maria (Polly) Jefferson, to live with him. The teenage slave Sally Hemings was chosen to accompany Polly to France after an older slave became pregnant and could not make the journey.^[21] Originally, Jefferson arranged for Polly to "be in the care of her nurse, a black woman, to whom she is confided with safety" [Letter from Thomas Jefferson to Abigail Adams, Dec. 21, 1786]. According to Abigail Adams, "The old Nurse whom you expected to have attended her, was sick and unable to come. She has a Girl about 15 or 16 with her." [Letter from Abigail Adams to Thomas Jefferson, June 26, 1787].^[22]

Polly and Sally landed in London, where they stayed with Abigail and John Adams from June 26 until July 10, 1787. Jefferson's associate, Mr. Petit, arranged transportation and escorted the girls to Paris. In a letter to Jefferson on June 27, 1787, Abigail wrote, "The Girl who is with [Polly] is quite a child, and Captain Ramsey is of opinion will be of so little Service that he had better carry her back with him. But of this you will be a judge. She seems fond of the child and appears good naturd." On July 6, Abigail wrote to Jefferson, "The Girl she has with her, wants more care than the child, and is wholly incapable of looking properly after her, without some superiour to direct her."^[22]

Sally Hemings remained in France for 26 months; slavery was abolished in that country after the Revolution in 1789. Jefferson paid wages to her and James while they were in Paris. He paid Sally Hemings the equivalent of \$2 a month. In comparison, he paid his Parisian scullion \$2.50 a month, and James Hemings \$4 a month as chef in training. The French servants earned from \$8 to \$12 a month.^[23] Toward the end of their stay, James used his money to pay for a French tutor and learn the language. Sally Hemings also was learning French.^[10] There is no record of where she lived: it may have been with Jefferson and her brother in the Hôtel de Langeac on the Champs-Élysées, or at the convent Abbaye de Panthemont where the girls Maria and Martha were schooled. Whatever the weekday arrangements, Jefferson and his retinue spent weekends together at his villa.^[24] Jefferson purchased some fine clothing for Hemings, which suggests that she accompanied Martha as a lady's maid to formal events.^{[25][26]}

Under French law, both Sally and James could have petitioned for their freedom, as the 1789 revolutionary constitution in France abolished slavery in principle.^[27] Hemings had the legal right to remain in France as a free person; if she returned to Virginia with Jefferson, it would be as a slave. According to her son Madison's memoir, Hemings became pregnant by Jefferson in Paris. She was about 16 at the time. She agreed to return with him to the United States based on his promise to free their children when they reached the age of 21 years.^{[10][28]} Hemings' strong ties to her mother, siblings and extended family probably drew her back to Monticello.^{[29][30]}

Return to the United States

In 1789, Sally and James Hemings returned to the United States with Jefferson. He was 46 years old and seven years a widower. As shown by Jefferson's father-in-law, John Wayles, wealthy Virginia widowers frequently took enslaved women as concubines. Historian Joshua D. Rothman noted that it was not unusual for the time for Jefferson to choose to do so. White society simply expected these men to be discreet.^[31]

According to Madison Hemings, Sally Hemings' first child died soon after her return from Paris. Those Jefferson records that have survived mutilation and purge note that Hemings had six children after her return to the US:^[32]

- Harriet Hemings (I) (October 5, 1795 - December 7, 1797)^[33]
- Beverley Hemings (*possibly named William Beverley Hemings*) (April 1, 1798 - after 1873)^[33]
- unnamed daughter (*or possibly named Thenia after Hemings' sister Thenia*) (born in 1799 and died in infancy)^[33]
- Harriet Hemings (II) (May 22, 1801 - after 1863)^[33]
- Madison Hemings (*possibly named James Madison Hemings*) (January 19, 1805 – 1877)^[33]
- Eston Hemings (*possibly named Thomas Eston Hemings*) (May 21, 1808 – 1856)^[33]

Jefferson recorded slave births in his Farm Book. Unlike his practice in recording births of other slaves, he did not note the father of Hemings' children.^[34]

Sally Hemings' documented duties at Monticello included being a nursemaid-companion, lady's maid, chambermaid, and seamstress. It is not known whether she was literate, and she left no known writings.^[33]

She was described as very fair, with "straight hair down her back".^[19] Jefferson's grandson, Thomas Jefferson Randolph, described her as "light colored and decidedly good looking". As an adult she may have lived in a room in Monticello's "South Dependencies", a wing of the mansion which was accessible to the main house through a covered passageway.^[35]

Hemings never married. As a slave, she could not have a marriage recognized under Virginia law, but many slaves at Monticello are known to have taken partners in common-law marriages and had stable lives. (No such marriage for Hemings is noted in the records.) While Sally Hemings worked at Monticello, she had her children nearby. According to her son Madison, while young, the children "were permitted to stay about the 'great house', and only required to do such light work as going on errands".^[10] At the age of 14, each of the children began their training: the brothers with the plantation's skilled master of carpentry, and Harriet as a spinner and weaver. The three boys all learned to play the violin (Jefferson played the violin).^[10]

In 1822 at the age of 24, Beverley "ran away" from Monticello and was not pursued. His sister Harriet Hemings, 21, followed in the same year. The overseer Edmund Bacon said that he gave her \$50 (US\$988 in 2016 dollars^[36]) and put her on a stagecoach to the North, presumably to join her brother.^[37] In his memoir, published posthumously, Bacon said Harriet was "near white and very beautiful", and that people said Jefferson freed her because she was his daughter.^[38] Madison Hemings said that Beverley and Harriet each entered white society in Washington, DC, and each married well.^[10]

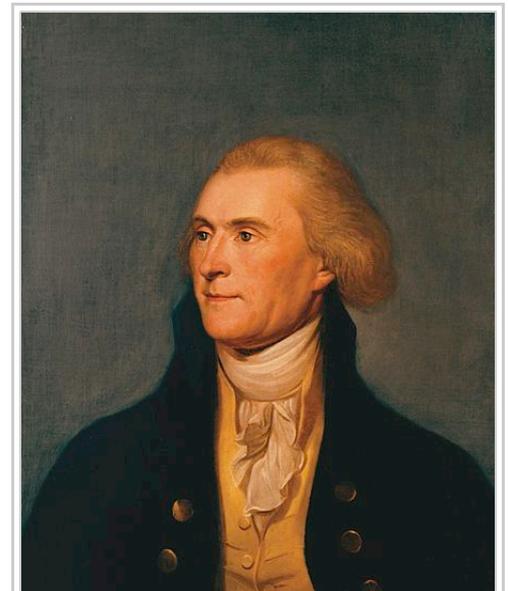
Of the hundreds of slaves he owned, in his lifetime Jefferson formally freed only two slaves: Hemings' older brothers Robert, who had to buy his freedom, and James Hemings (who was required to train his brother Peter for three years to get his freedom). He freed five slaves in his will - all males from the extended

Hemings family, including Madison and Eston Hemings, his two "natural" children. Harriet was the only female slave he allowed to go free.^[39] In addition to manumission for the Hemings men in his will, he petitioned the legislature to allow them to stay in the state. No documentation has been found for Sally Hemings' emancipation.^{[34][35]}

Jefferson's married daughter Martha Randolph informally freed the elderly Hemings by giving her "her time." As the historian Edmund S. Morgan has noted, "Hemings herself was withheld from auction and freed at last by Jefferson's daughter, Martha Jefferson Randolph, who was, of course, her niece."^[40] This informal freedom allowed Hemings to live in Virginia with her two youngest sons in nearby Charlottesville for the next nine years until her death.^[37] In the Albemarle County 1833 census, all three were recorded as free white persons.^{[41][42]} Jefferson inherited a great amount of wealth at a young age, but was bankrupt by the time he died. His entire estate, including his slaves, were sold to repay his debts.^[28] Hemings lived to see a grandchild born in a house that her sons owned.^[9]

Jefferson–Hemings controversy

The Jefferson–Hemings controversy is related to the question of whether, after Jefferson became a widower, he had an intimate relationship with Sally Hemings, resulting in his fathering her six children of record. The controversy dates from the 1790s. A relationship between Jefferson and Hemings was first reported in 1802, by one of Jefferson's enemies, a political journalist named James T. Callender, after he noticed several light skinned slaves at Monticello.^[43] However, Jefferson never publicly denied this accusation.^[43] In the late 20th century, historians began reanalyzing the body of evidence. In 1997, Annette Gordon-Reed published a book, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy*, that analyzed the historiography of the controversy, demonstrating how historians since the 19th century had accepted early assumptions. They favored Jefferson family testimony while criticizing Hemings family testimony as "oral history", and failed to note all the facts.^[44] A consensus began to emerge after the results of a DNA analysis in 1998,^[45] which showed no match between the Carr male line, proposed for more than 150 years as the father(s), and the one Hemings descendant tested. It did show a match between the Jefferson male line and the Eston Hemings descendant.^[46]



Thomas Jefferson, The third President of The United States, c.1791

Since 1998 and the DNA study,^[45] many historians have concluded that the widower Jefferson had an intimate, long relationship with Hemings, and fathered six children with her, four of whom survived to adulthood. The Thomas Jefferson Foundation (TJF), which runs Monticello, conducted an independent historic review in 2000, as did the National Genealogical Society in 2001; scholars concluded Jefferson was probably the father of all Hemings' children.^{[5][47]} In an article that appeared in *Science*,^[48] eight weeks

after the DNA study, Eugene Foster, the lead co-author of the DNA study, is reported to have "made it clear that the data establish only that Thomas Jefferson was one of several candidates for the paternity of Eston Hemings".^[49]

In an interview in 2000, the historian Annette Gordon-Reed said of the change in historical scholarship about Jefferson and Hemings: "Symbolically, it's tremendously important for people ... as a way of inclusion. Nathan Huggins said that the Sally Hemings story was a way of establishing black people's birthright to America."^[25]

Critics, such as the Thomas Jefferson Heritage Society (TJHS) Scholars Commission (2001), have argued against the TJF report and reached different conclusions about the DNA tests. All but one of the 13 scholars expressed considerable skepticism about the conclusions. The TJHS report suggested that Jefferson's younger brother Randolph Jefferson could have been the father, and that Hemings may have had multiple partners.^[50] Three of the Hemings children were given names from the Randolph family, relatives of Thomas Jefferson through his mother. Herbert Barger, the founder and current Director Emeritus of the TJHS and the husband of a Jefferson descendant, assisted Foster in the DNA study.^[49]

In 2012, the Smithsonian Institution and the Thomas Jefferson Foundation held a major exhibit at the National Museum of American History: *Slavery at Jefferson's Monticello: The Paradox of Liberty*; it says that "evidence strongly support[s] the conclusion that [Thomas] Jefferson was the father of Sally Hemings' children."^[51]

Descendants

In 2008 Gordon-Reed published *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family*, which explored the extended family, including James and Sally's lives in France, Monticello and Philadelphia, during Thomas Jefferson's lifetime.^[52] She was not able to find much new information about Beverly or Harriet Hemings, who left Monticello as young adults and entered the white community, probably changing their names.^[10] More documentation reveals the lives of the younger sons Madison Hemings and Eston Hemings, and of their descendants, from Madison's memoir, a wide variety of historical records, and newspaper accounts.^[53]

Eventually three of Hemings' four surviving children, except for Madison, chose to identify as white adults in the North; they were seven-eighths European in ancestry and this was consistent with their appearance.^[54] In his memoir, Madison Hemings said both Beverley and Harriet married well in the white community in Washington, DC. Harriet was described by Edmund Bacon, the longtime Monticello overseer, as "nearly as white as anybody, and very beautiful".^[55] For some time Madison wrote to both his siblings, and learned of their marriages. He knew that Harriet had children and was living in Maryland, but gradually she and Beverly stopped responding to his letters and the siblings lost touch.^[10]

Both Madison and Eston Hemings married free women of color in Charlottesville. After their mother's death in 1835, they and their families moved to Chillicothe in the free state of Ohio. Census records classified them as "mulatto", at that time meaning mixed race. The census enumerator, usually a local person, classified individuals in part according to who their neighbors were and what was known of them.^[56]

A high demand for slaves in the Deep South and passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 heightened the risk for free blacks of being kidnapped by slave catchers, as they needed little documentation to claim blacks as fugitives. Legally free people of color, Eston Hemings and his family moved to Madison, Wisconsin to be further away from slave catchers. There he changed his name to "Eston H. Jefferson" to acknowledge his paternity, and all the family adopted the surname. From then on the Jeffersons lived in the white community.^[57]

Madison Hemings' family were the only Hemings descendants who continued to identify with the black community. They intermarried within the community of free people of color before the Civil War. Over time, some of their descendants are known to have passed into the white community, while many others have identified within the black community.^[58]

Both Eston and Madison achieved some success in life, were well respected by their contemporaries, and had children who repeated and built on their successes.^[59] They worked as carpenters, and Madison also had a small farm. Eston became a professional musician and bandleader, "a master of the violin, and an accomplished 'caller' of dances", who "always officiated at the 'swell' entertainments of Chillicothe".^[35] He was in demand across southern Ohio. A neighbor described him as, "Quiet, unobtrusive, polite and decidedly intelligent, he was soon very well and favorably known to all classes of our citizens, for his personal appearance and gentlemanly manners attracted everybody's attention to him."^[60]

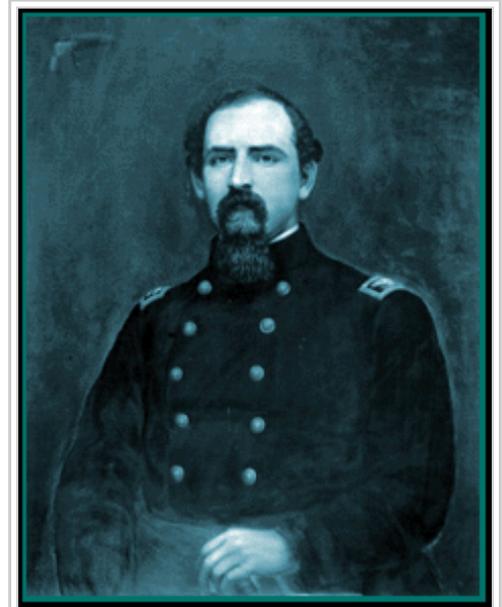
Grandchildren and other descendants

Madison's sons fought on the Union side in the Civil War. Thomas Eston Hemings enlisted in the United States Colored Troops (USCT); captured, he spent time at the Andersonville POW camp and died in a POW camp in Meridian, Mississippi. According to a Hemings descendant, his brother James attempted to cross Union lines and "pass" as a white man to enlist in the Confederate army to rescue him.^[61] Later, James Hemings was rumored to have moved to Colorado and perhaps passed into white society. Like some others in the family, he disappeared from the record and the rest of his biography remains unknown.^[62] A third son, William Hemings, enlisted in the regular Union Army as a white man.^[62] Madison's last known male-line descendant, William never married and was not known to have had children. He died in 1910 in a veterans' hospital.^[63]

Some of Madison Hemings' children and grandchildren who remained in Ohio suffered from the limited opportunities for blacks at that time, working as laborers, servants or small farmers. They tended to marry within the mixed-race community in the region, who became established as people of education and property.^[64]

Madison's daughter Ellen Wayles Hemings married Alexander Jackson Roberts, a graduate of Oberlin College. When their first son was young, they moved to Los Angeles, California, where the family and its descendants became leaders in the twentieth century. Their first son Frederick Madison Roberts (1879–1952) – Sally Hemings' and Jefferson's great-grandson – was the first person of known black ancestry elected to public office on the West Coast: he served for nearly 20 years in the California State Assembly from 1919 to 1934. Their second son William Giles Roberts was also a leader.^[65] Their descendants have had a strong tradition of college education and public service.^[66]

Eston's sons also enlisted in the Union Army, both as white men from Madison. His first son John Wayles Jefferson had red hair and gray eyes like his grandfather Jefferson. By the 1850s, John Jefferson in his 20s was proprietor of the American Hotel in Madison. At one time he operated it with his younger brother Beverley. He was commissioned as a Union officer during the Civil War, during which he was promoted to the rank of Colonel and served at the Battle of Vicksburg. He wrote letters about the war to the newspaper in Madison which were published.^[67] After the war, John Jefferson returned to Wisconsin, where he wrote frequently for newspapers and published accounts about his war experiences. He later moved to Memphis, Tennessee, where he became a successful and wealthy cotton broker. He never married or had known children,^{[62][63]} and left a sizeable estate.^[68]



Colonel John Wayles Jefferson, a grandson of Hemings, through her son Eston

Eston's second son Beverley Jefferson also served in the regular Union Army. After operating the American Hotel with his brother John, he later separately operated the Capital Hotel. He also built a successful horse-drawn "omnibus" business. He and his wife Anna M. Smith had five sons, three of whom reached the professional class as a physician, attorney, and manager in the railroad industry.^[68] According to his 1908 obituary, Beverley Jefferson was "a likeable character at the Wisconsin capital, and a familiar of statesmen for half a century".^[68] His friend Augustus J. Munson wrote, "Beverly Jefferson[']s death deserves more than a passing notice, as he was a grandson of Thomas Jefferson ... [He] was one of God's noblemen - gentle, kind, courteous, charitable."^[69] Beverley and Anna's great-grandson John Weeks Jefferson is the Eston Hemings descendant whose DNA was tested in 1998; it matched the Y-chromosome of the Thomas Jefferson male line.^[70]

As of 2007, there are known male-line descendants of Eston Hemings/Jefferson, and known female-line descendants of Madison Hemings' three daughters: Sarah, Harriet, and Ellen.^{[37][71]}

See also

- Cultural depictions of Sally Hemings
- Thomas Jefferson and slavery
- List of slaves

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