

Briefly About . . .

Betty Hemings **(Elizabeth Hemings)** (b 1735 – d 1807)

She was the matriarch of the large Hemings family. According to her grandson, Madison Hemings, she was the daughter of an English trading vessel captain and a Virginia slave of full African heritage—possibly from the West African Guinea coast.

Betty was born in 1735. It is known that in 1746 she belonged to Francis Eppes IV of Bermuda Hundred in Chesterfield County, Virginia. In this year, she was given to Martha Eppes (daughter of Francis) and John Wayles of The Forest (Charles City County, Virginia). Madison Hemings further related that Betty became the concubine of Wayles after 1761 when he lost his third wife. During this time, Madison said Betty had six children by Wayles. They were Robert, James, Thenia, Critta, Peter and Sally. Of interest, this would make Sally the half sister of Martha Wayles (daughter of John) who married Thomas Jefferson.

Betty was described by Isaac Jefferson (slave of Thomas Jefferson) as being “a bright mulatto woman” and Sally as being “mighty near white.” When John Wayles died, Betty and her offspring were inherited by Thomas Jefferson through his wife, Martha. This inheritance was recorded in the *Farm Book* in 1774. Betty had her own cabin and she with her children became the dominant servants inside Monticello. As a family, they presided over all domestic duties. Their attire was superior to other slaves, wearing colored fabric, calico, and special uniforms. At harvest time, they did not get called to work in the fields.

Mary Hemings (b 1753)

- seamstress
- daughter of Betty Hemings
- she was hired by Thomas Bell (a Charlottesville merchant) while Jefferson was in France.
- in 1792, she requested to be sold to Thomas Bell, as he had become her common-law husband.
- only youngest two children (Bob and Sally), fathered by Bell, were sold with her
- her older children, Betsy (age 9) & Joseph Fossett (age 12), remained enslaved at Monticello, while maintaining some contact with their free family.

Martin Hemings (b 1755 – d 1807)

- butler
- son of Betty Hemings
- Martin, James, and Robert hired themselves out for extra money (which they could keep) when Jefferson was absent from the plantation.
- after a disagreement with Jefferson in 1792, Martin asked to be sold. No record has been found of the sale but he disappeared from plantation rolls in the next couple of years.