

Two Jefferson Lines Traced by Historian

By Megan Rosenfeld Washington Post Staff Writer

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This is the tale of two families, one black, the other white. Both families can point to generations of accomplishment and respectability — and, according to historian Fawn M. Brodie, common ancestors, Thomas Jefferson and his slave mistress, Sally Hemings.

In an article in the October issue of *American Heritage* magazine, Brodie is publishing new evidence to support her belief that Jefferson fathered seven illegitimate children, five of whom survived infancy.

Their descendants live today in New Jersey, New York, Philadelphia and Los Angeles as teachers, artists, students, municipal employees and home-makers. For the most part they are unconcerned with their link to America's third President nor in any way embarrassed by what would once have been described as the "taint" of illegitimacy and mixed blood.

"I can only be proud of Sally Hemings," said Julia Jefferson Westerinen, a 42-year-old New York artist and teacher. "She held the affection of one man for 38 years in the face of overwhelming social pressure. She must have been a heck of a woman."

But it is miscegenation, which until relatively recently was illegal in Virginia, and the "taint" of illegitimacy that have made the search for Hemings' descendants difficult. Nor have "establishment"



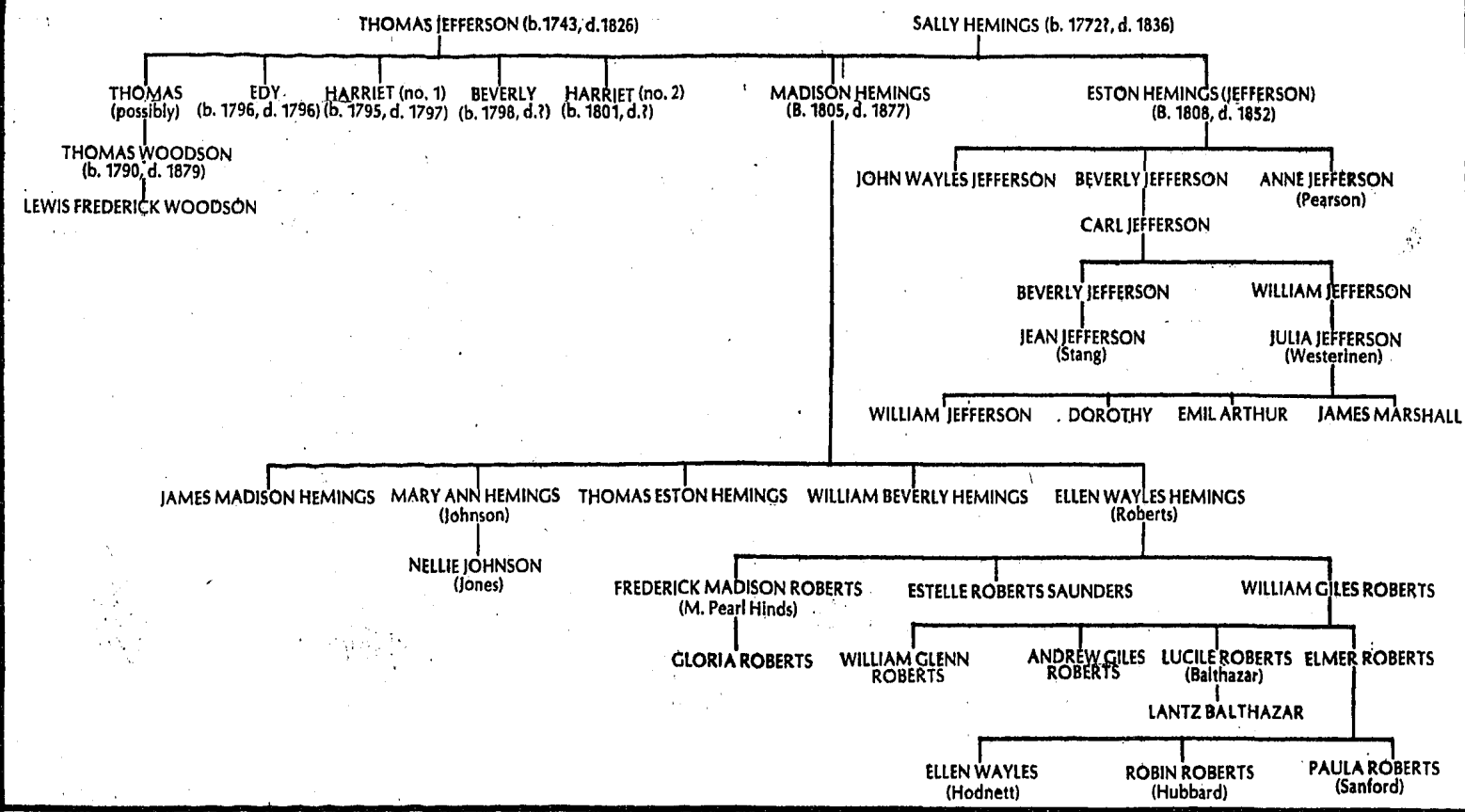
LUCILE K. BALTHAZ / JULIA J. WEST
... members of black, white Jefferson-descended families

Jefferson scholars or "legitimate" descendants ever accepted Brodie's claim that Hemings was Jefferson's mistress and bore him children. That claim, which was widespread—but denied—during Jefferson's life, was newly documented in Brodie's 1974 biography "Thomas Jefferson, An Intimate History."

Brodie's theory that Sally Hemings was Jefferson's mistress is based on a variety of factors including Jefferson's account books, the memoirs of Sally's

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DESCENDANTS OF THOMAS JEFFERSON AND SALLY HEMINGS



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son Madison, letters from Jefferson's daughters, and contemporary newspaper reports published first in 1802.

Brodie notes that Sally Hemings was taken to Paris with Jefferson to be a house servant there, and that Jefferson's account books show him spending at one point "almost as much money on clothes for 16-year-old Sally as for his eldest daughter, Martha."

According to Madison Hemings' memoirs, Sally conceived her first son, Tom, in France and gave birth to him shortly after returning to the United States. Brodie said that according to Jefferson's "Farm Book," in which he recorded the details of business at Monticello, none of Sally's children could have been conceived at times when he was not at Monticello. In addition, Brodie writes, Sally was the only servant in charge of Jefferson's "chamber and wardrobe."

Brodie also speculates that it is unlikely that a relatively young man (Jefferson was 39 when his wife died) would abstain from sex for the rest of life, and notes that friends and relatives, including his father-in-law, had slave mistresses and children by them.

Jefferson scholars, such as Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Dumas Malone, reject Brodie's theory, however. Malone, who is in Washington for the dedication of the Jefferson annex at the Library of Congress today, said in a telephone interview yesterday that Brodie's theory is "absolute nonsense."

Although he does not believe that Jefferson necessarily remained celibate as a widower, the notion that he "carried on a liaison with a slave for nearly 40 years under the full view of his family and conceived children by her while he was President of the United States is absurd.

"Mrs. Brodie belongs to the modern sexual school," Malone said. "It holds that sexual restraint is impossible. . . Now I don't say that Mr. Jefferson was a perfect man, but he was very controlled. At any rate, this thing can't be proved. It can't be disproved but the probabilities from my view, as someone who is intimately familiar with Mr. Jefferson, are that it is utter nonsense."

One facet of the Brodie lineage story is that three of the children "passed" into white society, while two chose to marry blacks and live in that separate world. One descendant was the first black man to be elected a state legislator in California; another married the granddaughter of Charles G. Dawes, a white man who was Calvin Coolidge's vice president. The two never knew of their alleged relationship to each other.

The living black descendants of Madison Hemings, and the white descendants of his younger brother Eston, who took the surname Jefferson, knew only through family legend that they might be related to the nation's third President and knew nothing of each other until Brodie's research made the connection.

In an interview, Brodie said that many persons claim to be descended from Jefferson, but that those she has written about in her article are the

only ones whose claims seem genuine and documentable.

Descendants of both Eston and Madison Hemings contacted Brodie independently after the publication of her book, she said, offering scrapbooks, pictures and other family memorabilia that helped her document to her satisfaction their Jeffersonian lineage.

"It was never really talked about in our family," Mrs. Westerinen said during an interview at her house in Staten Island, N.Y. "We were told we were related somehow to an uncle of Jefferson's."

"The black heirs had chosen to remain silent in the past mostly because they were not believed," Mrs. Brodie wrote in her article. "The whites, descendants of the children of Eston Hemings who 'went Caucasian,' retained a tenacious tradition of descent from Jefferson but found the connections obscure."

The aspect of "passing"—whereby a person of mixed blood who is fair skinned enough to be considered "white" cuts his or her ties with black relatives and lives as a white—makes the Jefferson-Hemings history an illustration of not only a social phenomenon and a genealogist's nightmare but, according to Brodie, an example of "white man's arrogance in deciding when the almost white is white enough. . ."

Sally Hemings was actually three-quarters white, being the daughter of Jefferson's father-in-law and a mulatto slave named Betty Hemings. The Jefferson-Hemings children were thus octaroons, and by Jefferson's definition of when a black man becomes white, they were white, according to the Brodie article.

Mrs. Westerinen's great-great-grandfather, Jefferson's youngest son Eston Hemings, was recorded as white by the 1830 census in Virginia, according to Brodie's article. He married a "colored" woman, Julia, and they moved to Chillicothe, Ohio, in 1836, lived in the black community, and in the 1850 census he was listed as a "mulatto." The couple moved to Madison, Wis., a year later, changed their last name to Jefferson and their identity to white. Eston Jefferson died in 1852 at age 46, and in the 1860 census his surviving wife and three children are all listed as white.

Madison Hemings, who like Eston was freed by Jefferson under the terms of his will, also moved to Ohio in 1836. Unlike Eston, he stayed in the black community, but publicly claimed he was the son of Thomas Jefferson. Brodie reports that in 1870 the census taker of Ross County who recorded Hemings as Virginia-born and aged 65, ". . . broke all the rules of census bureaucrats by writing on the same line, with an exclamation point: 'This man is the son of Thomas Jefferson!'"

Hemings wrote an account of his life at Monticello which was published in an Ohio newspaper and also in Brodie's book. Brodie writes that it was a common practice to protect the identity of those who had "passed" into white society and Madison Hemings wrote only that Eston had moved to Wisconsin.

Madison Hemings was described as

sandy-haired and gray-eyed, according to Brodie's research, and his daughter Ellen Wayles Hemings Roberts had blue eyes and red hair (as did Jefferson). Ellen's granddaughter, Lucile Roberts Balthazar, recalled in a telephone interview that when her grandmother went for a drive with her family, onlookers thought "her husband was her chauffeur and her daughter was her maid."

Her grandson, Andrew G. Roberts told Brodie that "When the children would ask her if she was white or black she would not answer."

"I guess it sounds strange these days," said Mrs. Balthazar, who lives in Los Angeles. "But people then didn't want others to know there was illegitimacy in the family."

Mrs. Balthazar's father and grandfather were undertakers in Los Angeles, and she has three brothers: Andrew, a retired post office clerk; Elmer W., a probation officer, and William G., a retired painting contractor. Her son, Lantz, is an Air Force major and lives in Reston.

Elmer Roberts, who has three daughters and five grandchildren, said in a telephone interview he has no resentment toward Jefferson for not marrying Sally Hemings. "He probably would have been run out of Virginia if he had," Jefferson was a widower when the alleged liaison began.

Roberts, 52, who is dark-skinner, recalled in response to a question that he has been the victim of racial discrimination upon occasion.

"I was in the Navy in World War II," he said. "I was a yeoman and assigned to this one ship. The captain told the second in command, 'Send that nigger ashore. I won't have that yeoman on my ship.' And (while he was in a hospital he noticed that) the doctors wouldn't mix black blood and white."

Although Madison Hemings had three sons and several daughters, only Ellen Roberts can be traced, according to the Brodie article. Two of his sons fought on the Union side during the Civil War; one died in a Confederate prison and another in a veterans hospital in Kansas. The third moved to Colorado, "passed" into white society, and "disappeared."

Ellen Roberts, on the other hand, became the progenitor of what Brodie describes as "one of the most remarkable black families in Southern California."

She married a black Oberlin College graduate and they moved from Ohio to Los Angeles at the turn of the century, Brodie writes. One of their sons, Frederick Madison Roberts, was the first black to be elected to the California State Assembly, where he served from 1918 to 1936. He also founded a newspaper, helped found the University of California at Los Angeles, reportedly gave the late Ralph Bunche (former under secretary general of the United Nations) his first job, and ran unsuccessfully for Congress against Helen Gahagan Douglas in 1938.

Eston (Hemings) Jefferson also had two sons who fought on the Union side during the Civil War. One, John, was described in Army records as gray-eyed and red-haired, according to

Brodie's article. John left the Army a lieutenant colonel, after being wounded at Vicksburg.

He subsequently wrote articles for newspapers, became a banker, and founded the Continental Cotton Co. in Memphis. He died in 1892 at the age of 57, a bachelor.

John's sister Anne married an Albert Pearson and had two sons, one of whom became president of the Standard Screw Co. in Chicago and left an estate of \$2 million, according to Brodie's research.

Julia Jefferson Westerinen's great-grandfather (John's brother Beverly) lived in Madison, Wis., owned two hotels and was a prominent citizen in the town.

Her father, William, was a public accountant. She was raised for the most part in the upper-middle-class Chicago suburb of Evanston, attended private schools, lived in Bucks County, Pa., and graduated from the University of Delaware. She has a younger brother, John, 28, who attends Temple University in Philadelphia.

Julia Westerinen finds the Jefferson connection interesting but not nearly as involving as her work toward a doctorate in education, teaching art to high school students and teachers, working on her paintings and sculpture, and raising four children, aged 20, 18, 15, and 13. Her husband, Emil, whose father was born in Finland and worked as a carpenter in Elkton, Md., is a civilian education specialist at nearby Ft. Wadsworth.

Mrs. Westerinen said her cousin Jean Jefferson Stang, contacted Brodie after reading her Jefferson biography. Until Brodie completed her research, Mrs. Westerinen said, she did not know she was descended directly from Thomas Jefferson, but she has confidence in the research, particularly in view of the family story that they were related to Jefferson's uncle, who, it seems, died in childhood.

The Westerinenes live in a 75-year-old house in the older part of Staten Island. Although she and her husband visited Monticello on their honeymoon, when she did not know of the possibility that she was a great-great-granddaughter of Jefferson, she has no plans for a return visit.

"I'm too busy!" she said. "It's nice, I mean Thomas Jefferson was such a renaissance man, he's something to live up to, but it's such a remote connection. I'm interested in the present."

Julia Westerinen is more excited about revolutionizing the way art is taught in schools, writing books, traveling, and doing a great many other things, than trying to convince the Monticello Association, the organization of "legitimate" Jefferson descendants, to admit her and her children to their circles.

The association, which refuses even to acknowledge the possibility of Jefferson having descendants by Sally Hemings, owns and operates the graveyard at Monticello and family members have the right to be buried there.

"I'm sure they wouldn't take a bastard," she said, laughing, "although some time when I have time I might see what they'd say for my children's sake. Personally I intend to be cremated. But I'd love to see the looks on their faces when I ask."