

Sally Hemings, an enslaved house servant

Reading Level: Elementary School

Sally Hemings was born in 1773. Her mother Betty Hemings was a slave. Laws at the time made Sally a slave. But she was described as “mighty near white.”

In 1774, Betty Hemings was given to Martha Jefferson, Thomas Jefferson’s wife. Sally and her ten brothers and sisters came to Monticello with their mother. What did Sally think of living at Monticello? How did she feel about being a slave? Sally did not write letters or keep a journal, so we don’t know her thoughts and feelings.

When Sally was fourteen, she sailed on a boat to Paris, France. She traveled with Mary, Thomas Jefferson’s youngest daughter. Crossing the Atlantic Ocean must have been exciting for the two girls!

In Paris, Sally learned to dress hair and stitch hems as a ladies’ maid. She explored the city with Mary and her older sister, Martha. Sally could have stayed in France where she would be free, but she returned to Monticello.

At Monticello, Sally helped care for Thomas Jefferson and his family. She gave birth to six children. Two died. Four of Sally’s children became free when they were older. In 1835, Sally died. Records show that in her last years, Sally was a “free people of color.”