

Anatomy of a Scandal

Thomas Jefferson and the Sally Story

by Rebecca L. McMurry and James F. McMurry, Jr.

This book is a long awaited and well-researched expose of the Martha Jefferson-Sally Hemings half-sister legend. It is a favorite claim of the paternity believers that John Wayles, father of Martha Jefferson, also was the father of Sally Hemings. Although no interaction between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings has ever been shown, the Wayles legend is grounds for the argument that Jefferson must have been attracted to Hemings because she was his dead wife's sister. The legend must be taken on faith because the only reference to it is an 1805 newspaper article, appearing more than thirty years after Wayles' death.

The rumors and political slandering of Thomas Jefferson began with early political enemies of Jefferson, some fired from office or denied office due to malfeasance or unsuitability. The scandalmonger reporter, James T. Callender, was most notorious for his campaign lies that Thomas Jefferson had fathered children with one of his slaves, Sally Hemings. These slandering efforts were continued by Samuel Wetmore in the now famous Madison Hemings interview in Pike Co, Ohio. The authors examine in detail the inaccuracies in these newspapers stories and demonstrate the fallacy in relying on them as an historical basis that Thomas Jefferson was the father of any of the children of Sally Hemings.

Herbert Barger