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Thomas Jefferson Heritage Society

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NEW JEFFERSON HERITAGE SOCIETY ESTABLISHES COMMISSION OF
DISTINGUISHED SCHOLARS TO RE-EXAMINE JEFFERSON-HEMINGS
ISSUE

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The recently established Thomas Jefferson Heritage Society, Inc. (TJHS), has announced the formation of the Scholars Commission on the Jefferson-Hemings Issue (SC) to re-examine the allegation that Thomas Jefferson fathered one or more children by his slave Sally Hemings. The SC includes several nationally prominent historians, political scientists, legal scholars, etc., several of whom have authored one or more major books about Thomas Jefferson.

Members of the SC include such eminent scholars as:

Dr. Robert H. Ferrell, Distinguished Professor of History Emeritus, Indiana University, who is the author or editor of more than two dozen books;

Dr. Forrest McDonald, Distinguished University Research Professor of History, University of Alabama, and author of *The Presidency of Thomas Jefferson* and more than a dozen other books;

Dr. Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of Government, Harvard University, editor of *Thomas Jefferson: Selected Writings* and author or translator of many other books;

Dr. Alf J. Mapp, Jr., Eminent Scholar Emeritus and Louis I. Jaffe Professor of History, Emeritus, Old Dominion University, author of *Thomas Jefferson: A Strange Case of Mistaken Identity*, *Thomas Jefferson: Passionate Pilgrim*, and many other books;

Dr. David Mayer, Professor of Law and History, Capital University, author of *The Constitutional Thought of Thomas Jefferson*, and other works; and

Professor Willard Sterne Randall, Visiting Professor of Humanities at John Cabot University (Rome, Italy) and at Champlain College (Burlington, VT), author of *Thomas Jefferson: A Life*, and many other books.

(Affiliations are given for identification purposes only, and should not be construed as suggesting any association or approval by listed institutions of the SC or its final report).

The SC is chaired by Professor Robert F. Turner of the University of Virginia, who served previously as Charles H. Stockton Professor of International Law at the U.S. Naval War College and is an author or editor of more than a dozen books. The names of other SC members will be made public by early next year, when the SC is expected to issue a report on its findings.

The TJHS has been formed by a group of concerned businessmen and women, historians, genealogists, scientists, and patriots to perform and sponsor research in matters pertaining to the private and public life of Thomas Jefferson. The TJHS is a permanent organization with its own officers and directors. It is sponsoring the SC as an important part of its overall mission.

The specific mission of the SC is to make their best-informed judgment on the evidence that is currently available on whether Thomas Jefferson fathered any of Sally Hemings' children. Its mission is not to prove the possible paternity of Sally Hemings' children by Thomas Jefferson, but rather to render a judgment on its likelihood after carefully examining all of the available evidence in accordance with customary standards and weight of evidence. The SC is encouraged to pursue truth wherever it leads.

Please note that there is a widespread public perception that the issue of Jefferson's paternity of some of Sally Hemings' children has been resolved by DNA tests reported in the journal *Nature* in 1998. Mr. John H. Works, Jr., President of the new TJHS and a 6th great-grandson of the famous president, observed that "a misleading headline in the *Nature* article contributed to many inaccurate press accounts about the results of the DNA testing. In reality, the most significant results of the DNA tests were to discredit the original allegation made by the journalist James T. Callender in 1802 that Thomas Jefferson had fathered a child by Sally Hemings while the two of them were in Paris. For more than 150 years it has been assumed by the Woodson family, through 'oral history' (hearsay), that this child was Thomas Hemings Woodson."

But by testing 6 lines of Thomas Woodson's descendants (in 2 separate tests, one done recently), the scientists concluded that he could not possibly have been Thomas Jefferson's child. Scientists did find strong similarities between the Y-chromosome from the descendants of Thomas Jefferson's uncle, Field Jefferson, and those of descendants of Sally Hemings' youngest child, Eston, who was born when Thomas Jefferson was 65 and suffering health problems, and when Sally was 35. The representative DNA sample from Field Jefferson establishes nothing more than that Eston was probably fathered by one of more than 25 Jefferson males living in Virginia at the time, 8 of whom either lived at or regularly visited Monticello and most of whom were much younger than the President.

Since there is evidence that President Jefferson invited his much younger brother Randolph, who was between wives, to visit Monticello shortly before Sally Hemings is thought to have become pregnant with Eston, and since the intellectually-

challenged Randolph was known to have enjoyed cavorting into the early hours of the morning with Monticello slaves, he or his sons might reasonably seem to be more likely suspects for the paternity of Eston Hemings.

One of the many apparent flaws in the report of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation issued earlier this year on this topic was the assumption that Sally Hemings could only have had a single father to all of her children. Not only is this in direct conflict with the allegation of James T. Callender who first publicized the allegation, but it also ignores a wealth of evidence from the era attributing paternity of some of her children to one of the Carr brothers or to some other individual than the President. The only apparent basis for such an unwarranted assumption is that it makes it much easier to conclude that Thomas Jefferson was Eston Hemings' likely father.

These DNA tests have added little to the current information about Sally Hemings or any of her other children. Recently a grave was located of William Hemings, a civil war veteran fathered by Sally Hemings' son Madison, whose DNA results might make a valuable contribution to the issue of an alleged Thomas Jefferson–Sally Hemings affair.