



THE RECLAMATION OF

**MADISON
HEMINGS**

BY CHARLES SMITH



BACKSTAGE GUIDE

A publication of **COMMUNITY SERVICE** at
AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

BACKSTAGE CALLBOARD

THE RECLAMATION OF MADISON HEMINGS

by Charles Smith

Directed by Chuck Smith*

FEATURING



Manny Buckley*



Jon Hudson Odom

It's 1866, and the Civil War has ended. Madison Hemings, son of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings, and Israel Jefferson, formerly enslaved footman, return to Monticello in search of Israel's long-lost brother. Their search gets sidetracked when Madison decides to claim what's left of his birthright as the son of an American president. Together, the two men must face their conflicting feelings about the man who wrote "All men are created equal." Slavery has been abolished, but what has changed? What do we need to keep with us as we move through this world and what should we leave behind?

**Ensemble member of American Blues Theater*

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NOTE FROM EXECUTIVE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR **GWENDOLYN WHITESIDE**

Welcome to American Blues Theater. We asked Ensemble member and legend Chuck Smith if he could direct *any* play at this time – what would it be? With no hesitation – he responded this script. We're sure his long-standing relationship with playwright Charles Smith led to the permission granted to a theater of our size. We're honored to present the Chicago premiere of Charles Smith's poignant play *The Reclamation of Madison Hemings*.

Charles Smith and Chuck Smith's work speaks for itself. They have called on the ancestors; everyone will bear witness. The performances by Jon Hudson Odom and Manny Buckley will stay with you long after you leave the theater.

We, the audience, have been given a staggering gift in this piece. There is beautiful, heartbreaking, and heart-making truth on this stage.

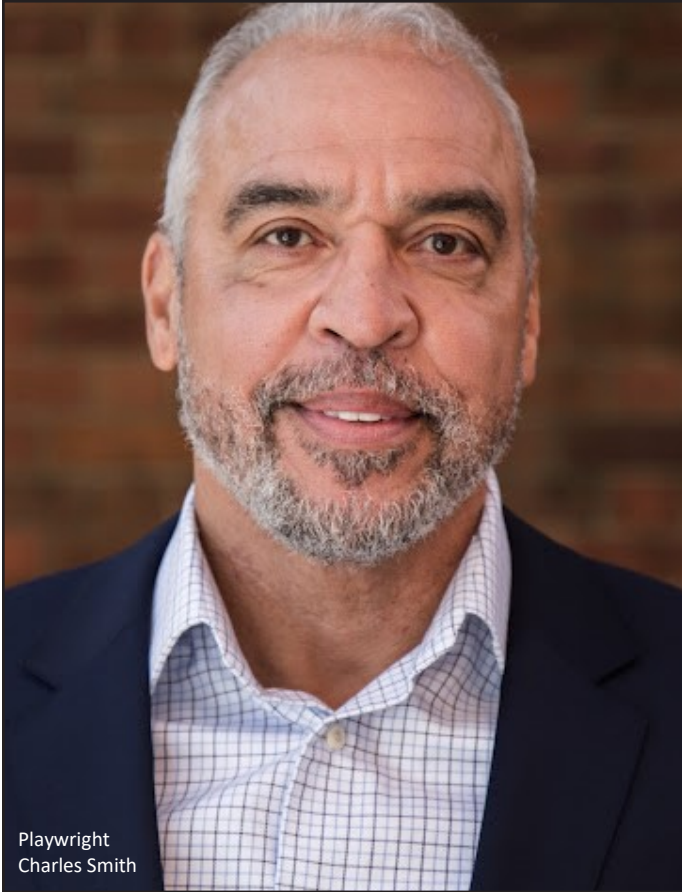
The way forward is to acknowledge, to name.

-Gwendolyn Whiteside



Executive Artistic Director
Gwendolyn Whiteside

NOTE FROM PLAYWRIGHT **CHARLES SMITH**



Playwright
Charles Smith

A few years ago, I visited the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama. Informally known as the Lynching Museum, the Memorial consists of more than 800 coffin-shaped oxidized steel markers engraved with the names of more than 4,400 Black Americans who were publicly tortured and murdered in the United States between 1877 and 1950. Before then, I had visited the Whitney Plantation in Louisiana, once a forced labor camp that is now a museum with an exclusive focus on the lives of the enslaved. On the grounds of the Whitney stands a granite Wall of Honor with the names of more than 350 enslaved people who lived and died working there, as well as a Field of Angels monument bearing the names of 2,200 enslaved children who died in the surrounding St. John the Baptist Parish between the 1820s and 1860s.

Mindful of the 3,000 names inscribed on the 9-11 Memorial in New York and the 58,000 names of servicemen engraved on Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC, I became fascinated by how

the listing of names has the power to keep past events present and vital. These memorials displaying the names of those slain serve to humanize individuals by opening a doorway into their lives while simultaneously shining a light on the mistakes we have made as a society.

The Reclamation of Madison Hemings was envisioned as, and commissioned to be, a two-person play about Madison Hemings and Israel Gillette Jefferson, two men who were enslaved at Thomas Jefferson's forced labor camp, Monticello. When I started researching the lives of these men, I came across the names of hundreds of other enslaved people who lived and died building and maintaining Monticello. The stories of these individuals were conspicuously absent from the historical information offered upon my first visit to the home of the author of the Declaration of Independence. Through continued research, I discovered names and glimpses into the lives of the others who had been enslaved on that hallowed ground. I felt a deep obligation to acknowledge and embrace the lives of these people who had been ignored by others for decades. However, my assignment was to write a two-person play. Faced with this quandary, I thought of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, and the Whitney, the Vietnam Memorial, and others like them, and became determined to translate the power of these granite and steel memorials into an ephemeral flesh and blood performance for the stage. *The Reclamation of Madison Hemings* is the result of that effort.

Source: Indiana Repertory Theatre

DESIGNERS' CORNER

The Designers' Corner is a behind-the-scenes peek into some of our designers creative processes for *The Reclamation of Madison Hemings*. Scenic & Props Designer Jonathan Berg-Einhorn and Costume Designer Lily Walls shared some of their preliminary design materials below.



Scenic Rendering by Jonathan Berg-Einhorn



Costume Design Inspiration Collages by Lily Walls.

The collage on the left is for Madison Hemings; the collage on the right is for Israel Jefferson.

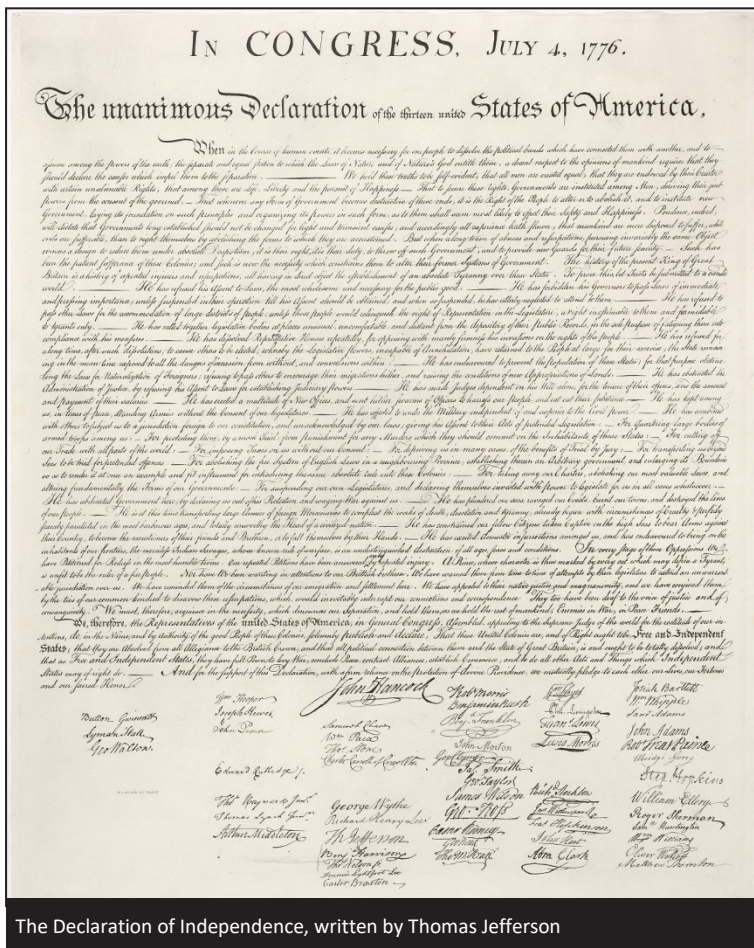
THE LEGACIES OF MADISON HEMINGS & ISRAEL JEFFERSON

The below essay by Tanya Palmer was written for the Indiana Repertory Theatre’s Study Guide for their world premiere production of *The Reclamation of Madison Hemings*. It has been reprinted here with permission.

In an 1873 interview with a local Ohio newspaper, the *Pike County Republican*, Israel Gillette Jefferson, who had been born into slavery on Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello plantation, recalled a conversation that he had overheard in 1824 between the former President and his French guest, the revolutionary war hero Marquis de Lafayette: “Lafayette remarked that he thought that the slaves ought to be free; that no man could rightly hold ownership in his brother man; that he gave his best services to and spent his money in behalf of the Americans freely because he felt that they were fighting for a great and noble principle—the freedom of mankind; that instead of all being free, a portion were held in bondage (which seemed to grieve his noble heart); that it would be mutually beneficial to masters and slaves if the latter were educated, and so on. Mr. Jefferson replied that he thought the time would come when the slaves would be free, but did not indicate when or in what manner they would get their freedom. He seemed to think that the time had not then arrived.”

This exchange gets at the heart of what can be so confounding for those reflecting on Thomas Jefferson’s legacy, and by extension the legacy of the founding national principles he helped to articulate as the primary author of *The Declaration of Independence*. The man who wrote “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,” was the same man who enslaved more than 600 human beings over the course of his lifetime. But as historian Annette Gordon-Reed argues in “Engaging Jefferson: Blacks and the Founding Father,” it is perhaps because of, rather than in spite of, these contradictions that “of all the Revolutionary founders, Thomas Jefferson has figured the most prominently in Blacks’ attempts to constitute themselves as Americans. His life, in public and private, has long served as a vehicle for analyzing and critiquing the central dilemma at the heart of American democracy: the desire to create a society based on liberty and equality runs counter to the desire to maintain White supremacy.... The contradictions that make Jefferson seem problematic and frustrating—a figure of mystery to some Whites—make him more accessible to Blacks, who find his conflicted nature a perfect reflection of the America they know: a place where high-minded ideals clash with the reality of racial ambivalence. As this combination daily informs Black lives, Jefferson could seem no more bizarre than America itself. He is utterly predictable and familiar—the foremost exemplar of the true America spirit and psyche.”

Beyond the dissonance between his stated ideals in *The Declaration of Independence* and his active and ongoing participation in chattel slavery, Jefferson wrote frequently in both private letters and in his one published work, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, about slavery as a “moral depravity.” But he also made clear



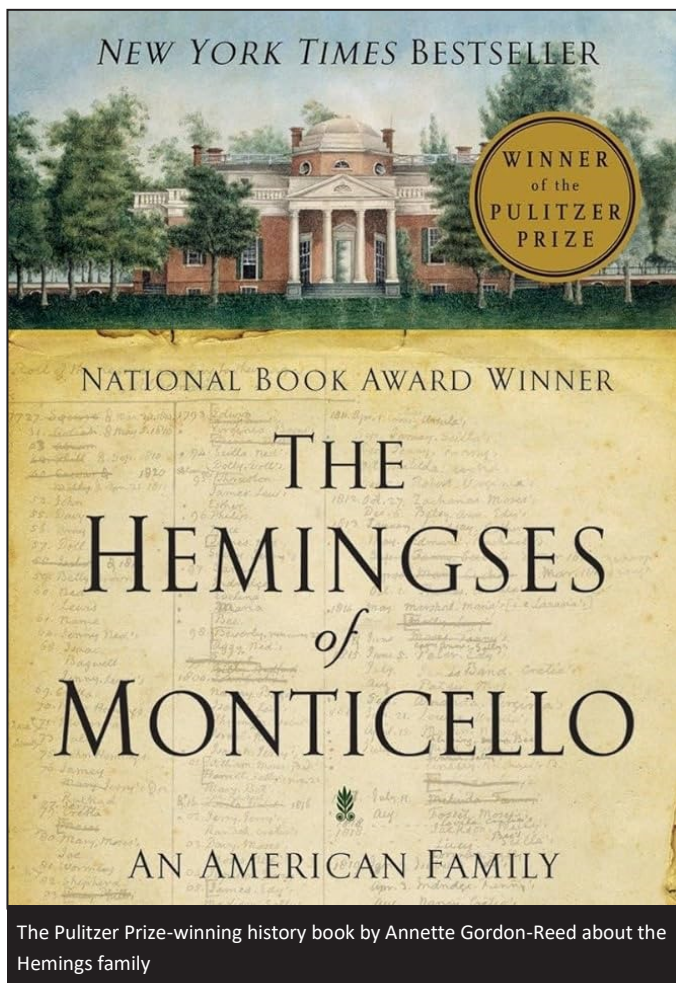
The Declaration of Independence, written by Thomas Jefferson

THE LEGACIES OF MADISON HEMINGS & ISRAEL JEFFERSON

that he believed Black people were inferior to Whites, and he wrote forcefully against miscegenation, saying that Blacks needed to be removed “beyond the reach of mixture.” And yet, as a 1998 DNA study made irrefutably clear, he also fathered seven children with the enslaved Sally Hemings, five of whom lived to adulthood.

One of those children, James Madison Hemings, known as Madison, is brought to vivid life in Charles Smith’s new play, *The Reclamation of Madison Hemings*, as is the man who shared his memories of Jefferson’s conversation with the Marquis de Lafayette: Israel Gillette Jefferson. Like Israel, Madison was born into slavery at Monticello, and strikingly, both men also lived out their final days as free men and property holding farmers in Southern Ohio. As boys and young men, they likely worked alongside one another both in the main house and in the nailery and woodshop along Mulberry Row, the center of Monticello’s agricultural industry. But while they shared many experiences, their paths diverged in subtle and overt ways, in part because of the blood connection that linked Madison Hemings to Jefferson.

Both Israel and Madison came from families with longstanding connections to Jefferson and his wife Martha. Edward Gillette, Israel’s father, was a farm laborer who was inherited by Jefferson from his father’s estate, while Israel’s mother, Jane, came to Monticello as part of the estate of John Wayles, Jefferson’s father-in-law. Jane and Edward had twelve children, all of whom lived to adulthood.



The Hemings family also arrived on Jefferson’s plantation as part of the estate of John Wayles, but they held a unique place at Monticello that pre-dated Jefferson taking Sally Hemings as his “concubine”—the word that Madison Hemings himself used in an interview with the *Pike County Republican* published in the same series that featured the recollections of Israel Jefferson. Sally’s mother, Elizabeth (Betty) Hemings, had ten children when she arrived in Monticello in 1774, a year after John Wayles’s death—six of whom, including Sally, were purported to be fathered by Wayles himself, making them half-siblings to Jefferson’s wife, Martha. In her exhaustive Pulitzer Prize-winning history, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family*, Annette Gordon-Reed describes the ways Jefferson maintained control of the Hemingses while also singling out certain members of the family for “special treatment,” arguably because of their status as blood relations. Of the only seven enslaved people that Jefferson legally emancipated—two during his lifetime, five after his death—all were members of the extended Hemings family. Madison and his brother Eston were among the five who were emancipated in Jefferson’s will. Madison left Monticello following Jefferson’s death in 1826, first living with his mother Sally in Charlottesville until her death in 1835, then traveling to Ohio with his wife Mary, a free woman of color, eventually settling on a 60-acre farm with their nine children.

THE LEGACIES OF MADISON HEMINGS & ISRAEL JEFFERSON

For Israel Gillette—and countless other men, women and children enslaved at Monticello (including many of the extended Hemings family)—Jefferson’s death, and the fact that he died deeply in debt, represented a cataclysm that tore them away from family and the only home they had ever known. As Israel recalled fifty years later, “all the rest of us were sold from the auction block.” Israel’s parents Edward and Jane were sold, as were nine of the Gillette children and twelve grandchildren— dispersing the family in at least ten different directions. Israel was sold to Thomas Gilmer, who went on to become a congressman and briefly Secretary of the Navy. Israel and his first wife, Mary Ann Colter, had four children together, but because both parents were enslaved, the fates of their children were beyond their control and took what he called “the usual course” of the enslaved. “I do not know where they are now,” he reported in his interview with the *Pike County Republican*, “if living.” After Mary Ann’s death, Israel vowed never again to marry a woman in bondage. His second wife, Elizabeth Farrows Randolph, was a seamstress and a free woman of color. It was Elizabeth who helped him raise the \$500 necessary to secure his freedom.

In 1844, while Madison Hemings was plying his trade as a carpenter and joiner, building buildings in Waverly, Ohio, Israel Gillette appeared in a Virginia courthouse to obtain a document that would officially recognize his new status of freedom. He recounted the story in 1873, describing how the clerk of the court asked him by what surname he chose to be known. “I hesitated,” he recalled, and the clerk suggested that it should be Jefferson, because “I was born at Monticello and had been a good and faithful servant to Thomas Jefferson.... I consented to adopt the surname of Jefferson, and have been known by it ever since.” That same year, nearly two decades after Madison Hemings had left Monticello as a free man, Israel Gillette Jefferson traveled west with his wife Elizabeth to Cincinnati, Ohio, where he was finally able to embrace his new identity as a free man. “When I came to Ohio, I considered myself wholly free,” he explained. “And not till then.”

By the time the Civil War started, Madison Hemings and Israel Gillette Jefferson were living within ten miles of each other on their own farms in Pike County in Southern Ohio. Once again their paths had converged, now in the Appalachian hills near Pee Pee Settlement, a predominantly African American community first settled by formerly enslaved men and women from Virginia.

In their two interviews with the *Pike County Republican*, both Madison and Israel affirm that Jefferson was the father of Sally Hemings’s children, and both men talk matter-of-factly about Jefferson’s dual roles as statesman and slaveholder. For these two men, who began life together on the same plantation and whose divergent paths out of slavery eventually brought them together again—this time by choice—the confounding hypocrisy that separated the ideals Jefferson espoused in public from his actions in his private life was undoubtedly one of many other contradictions, broken promises, and double standards they faced as African American men living in America. That their recollections survive as two of only three existing first-person accounts from Monticello’s enslaved population is a great gift and lasting legacy. It is through their words that we understand more about the lives of the many individuals and extended families—from the Gillettes and the Hemingses to the Hems and the Colberts and many more—who lived and labored at Monticello.

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THE LIFE OF **SALLY HEMINGS**

Sally Hemings (1773-1835) is one of the most famous—and least known—African American women in U.S. history. For more than 200 years, her name has been linked to Thomas Jefferson as his “concubine,” obscuring the facts of her life and her identity.

Like countless enslaved women, Sally Hemings bore children fathered by her owner. Female slaves had no legal right to refuse unwanted sexual advances. Sally Hemings was the child of an enslaved woman and her owner, as were five of her siblings. At least two of her sisters bore children fathered by white men. Mixed-race children were present at Monticello, in the surrounding county, across Virginia, and throughout the United States. Regardless of their white paternity, children born to enslaved women inherited their mothers’ status as slaves.

Unlike countless enslaved women, Sally Hemings was able to negotiate with her owner. In Paris, where she was free, the 16-year-old agreed to return to enslavement at Monticello in exchange for “extraordinary privileges” for herself and freedom for her unborn children. Over the next 32 years Hemings raised four children—Beverly, Harriet, Madison, and Eston—and prepared them for their eventual emancipation. She did not negotiate for, or ever receive, legal freedom in Virginia.



A historical likeness of Sally Hemings.

1773 Sally Hemings is born. The exact date and month is not known. Tradition holds that she is the child of Martha Jefferson’s father, John Wayles, and Elizabeth Hemings, an enslaved woman, making Martha and her half-sisters. Madison Hemings later stated that Elizabeth Hemings and Wayles had six children together. Like her mother, Hemings would go on to bear at least six children to her master.

1774 She came to Monticello as a toddler with the rest of her enslaved family after the death of her father. The Hemingses were part of Jefferson’s inheritance through his wife, Martha Wayles Skelton Jefferson. From a young age, Sally Hemings was a nursemaid to Jefferson’s younger daughter, Maria. Few other details of her childhood are known.

1787 When Sally Hemings was 14, she was chosen by Jefferson’s sister-in-law to accompany his daughter Maria to Paris, France, as a domestic

servant and maid in Jefferson’s household. Within ten weeks, she was transported from the plantations of Virginia to what Jefferson described as “the vaunted scene of Europe!”

Paris in the 1780s was at the apex of its grandeur, a global center of politics, culture and the arts. The city itself was home to over half a million people (close to the entire population of Virginia at the time), 1,000 of whom were free black residents. While in France, Hemings was also legally free.

In Paris, Hemings was reunited with her older brother James, whom Jefferson had brought with him two years earlier to study French cooking. They lived at Jefferson’s residence, the Hôtel de Langeac.

Why did she return to Monticello?

Madison Hemings recounted that his mother “became Mr. Jefferson’s concubine” in France. When Jefferson prepared to return to America, Hemings said his mother refused to come back, and only did so upon negotiating

THE LIFE OF **SALLY HEMINGS**

“extraordinary privileges” for herself and freedom for her future children.

We don’t know if she tried to negotiate for her personal freedom, or why she trusted Jefferson would keep his promise.

1808 Son Eston was born. He also survived to become a carpenter and a musician.

1822 Beverly and Harriet Hemings were allowed to leave Monticello without being legally freed. Madison Hemings later reported that both passed into white society and that neither their connection to Monticello nor their “African blood” was ever discovered.

1826 Thomas Jefferson died. Sally Hemings was never legally emancipated. Instead, she was unofficially freed—or “given her time”—by Jefferson’s daughter Martha after his death.

1826 Jefferson’s will freed Hemings’s younger children, Madison and Eston.

1830 Sally Hemings and her sons Madison and Eston are listed as free white people in the 1830 census. Three years later, in a special census taken following the Nat Turner Rebellion of 1831, Hemings described herself as a free mulatto who had lived in Charlottesville since 1826.

1835 Madison Hemings reported that his mother lived in Charlottesville with him and his brother Eston until her death in 1835. The location of her grave

1789 Hemings arrived back in Virginia and slavery at the age of 16. According to Madison Hemings, she was pregnant with Jefferson’s child.

1790 Sally Hemings’s first child is born. According to Madison Hemings, “It lived but a short time.”

1795 A daughter, Harriet Hemings, was born. She died two years later in 1797.

1798 A son, Beverly was born. He survived to adulthood, becoming a carpenter and fiddler.

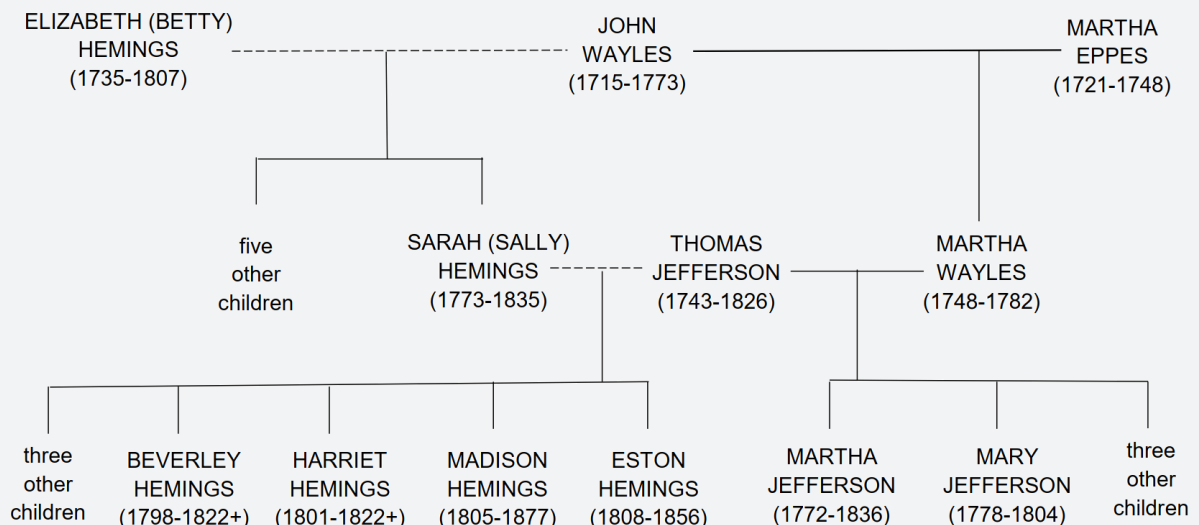
1799 An unnamed daughter was born and died.

1801 Harriet was born. She was their only surviving daughter, and was a spinner in Jefferson’s textile factory.

1805 A son, Madison was born. He survived to adulthood, becoming a carpenter and joiner.

A HEMINGS FAMILY TREE

This listing focuses on family members who are prominently featured in *The Reclamation of Madison Hemings*.



WHO'S WHO: THE HEMINGS & GILLETTES

Below is an overview of the historical figures in the Hemings and Gillette families prominently featured in *The Reclamation of Madison Hemings*.

ELIZABETH HEMINGS (MAMA BETT)

mother of Sally Hemings; grandmother of Madison Hemings

Elizabeth Hemings (1735–1807) was the enslaved matriarch of a large and prominent family that made up a third of the population at Monticello. Her children and descendants occupied the most important household and trade positions on the plantation. Elizabeth was the daughter of an English sea captain and an enslaved African woman. She had 12 children, six of them by her master, John Wayles, all of them enslaved. When Wayles died in 1773, they all became the property of Thomas Jefferson, who had married Wayles's daughter, Martha. Elizabeth lived to the age of 72, an extraordinarily old age for anyone in that era, let alone an enslaved person. In the last decade of her life, she had her own cabin at Monticello, where she raised produce and sold it to the Jefferson household.

MADISON HEMINGS

son of Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson

Madison Hemings (1805–1877) became free in 1827, according to the terms of Jefferson's will. Madison and his brother Eston left Monticello to live with their mother, Sally Hemings, in Charlottesville. Together they purchased a lot and built a two-story brick and wood house. In 1831, Madison married a free woman of color, Mary McCoy. In the late 1830s Madison and Mary left Virginia for rural Pike County in southern Ohio, where Mary's family was already settled. Madison helped build several structures in the notoriously anti-black town of Waverly. He gradually accumulated property, and by 1865 Madison and Mary and their nine children were living on a 66-acre farm. His recollections were written down in 1873 and published in the *Pike County Republican*.

BEVERLY HEMINGS

son of Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson

Beverly Hemings (1798—some time after 1821) was his parents' oldest surviving son. At Monticello he worked as carpenter. He was also a musician, called upon to play the violin for dances arranged by Jefferson's granddaughters. In late 1821 he left Monticello, as arranged by his parents. According to his brother Madison, Beverly passed into white society and raised a family in Washington DC or Maryland. There is no other record of his life following his departure.

SALLY HEMINGS

mother of Madison Hemings

Sarah (Sally) Hemings (c. 1773–1835) was the youngest of six children that Elizabeth Hemings had with her owner, John Wayles, who was also the father of Martha Wayles Jefferson, Thomas Jefferson's wife. Sally came to Monticello as a toddler with the rest of her enslaved family after the death of her father; she was part of Jefferson's inheritance through his wife, Martha—Sally's half-sister. Martha died in 1782. In 1784, Jefferson was appointed minister to France. At the age of 14, Sally was sent to live with Jefferson as a maid in his household. During that time in Paris, she and Jefferson began a relationship. When returned to the United States in 1789, Sally—who was legally free in France (and also pregnant)—refused to return with him until he promised “extraordinary privileges” for herself and freedom for her future children when they reached 21. Sally had at least six children fathered by Jefferson, four of whom survived to adulthood. Sally was never legally emancipated; instead she was unofficially freed, or “given her time” by Jefferson's daughter Martha after Jefferson's death. Sally and her sons Madison and Eston live in Charlottesville until her death.

HARRIET HEMINGS

daughter of Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson

Harriet Hemings (1801—some time after 1863) was her parents' only daughter to grow to adulthood. At the age of 14, she was trained to spin and weave and began working in the plantation's textile workshop. While she was never legally freed, at the age of 21, in accordance with the agreement between her parents, Harriet was allowed to “escape” with coach fare and \$50. Her brother Madison later said that she went to join their older brother Beverly in Washington DC, where she passed as white and married a white man of good circumstances. Although she stayed in touch with Madison for some time, by 1863 Harriet had stopped writing.

WHO'S WHO: THE HEMINGS & GILLETTES

ESTON HEMINGS JEFFERSON

son of Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson

Eston Hemings (1808-1856) learned the woodworking trade from his uncle, John Hemmings, and became free in 1827, according to the terms of Jefferson's will. He and his brother Madison left Monticello to live in Charlottesville with their mother, Sally Hemings. Together they purchased a lot and built a two-story brick and wood house. In 1832, Eston married a free woman of color, Julia Ann Isaacs. Around 1838 they moved to Chillicothe, Ohio, where Eston led a very successful dance band. He was remembered as "a master of the violin, and an accomplished 'caller' of dances." Around 1852 Eston and Julia and their three children left Ohio, changing their surname to Jefferson and living henceforth as white people. They settled in Madison, Wisconsin, where Eston worked as a cabinetmaker.

MOSES GILLETTE

brother to Israel Gillette Jefferson

Moses Gillette was born in 1803. He was a cooper—a maker and repairer of casks and barrels. He was sold after Jefferson's death to a local miller. After emancipation in 1865 (and after the time of the play), he moved to southern Ohio to live near his brother Israel.

JOHN HEMMINGS

son of Elizabeth Hemings, half-brother of Sally Hemings, uncle of Madison Hemings

John Hemmings (1776–1833) was an enslaved joiner at Monticello. His father was Joseph Neilson, an Irishman who was Jefferson's chief carpenter. At 14, John became an "out-carpenter," felling trees and hewing logs, building fences and barns, and helping to construct log slave dwellings. At 17 he was put to work at the main house. He was principal assistant to James Dinsmore, the Irish joiner responsible for most of the elegant woodwork in the Monticello house. John succeeded Dinsmore as head joiner in 1809, making fine furniture for Jefferson, including cabinets, chairs, and tables. Much more than a carpenter, he was a highly skilled joiner and cabinetmaker. He learned to read and write, and some of the letters between him and Jefferson survive, mainly concerning the construction of the house. Unlike the rest of the family, John spelled his last name with a double m.

ISRAEL GILLETTE JEFFERSON

Israel Gillette (1800–c. 1879) was one of 12 children born to Jane and Edward Gillette; the whole family were enslaved persons belonging to Thomas Jefferson at Monticello. As a boy, Israel worked in the Monticello house, building fires, running errands, and waiting at table; later he was a footman and a coachman. Israel's parents, his siblings, and his wife and four children were separated when Jefferson died in 1826 and his slaves were sold at auction. Israel never saw any of his family again. Israel was sold to Thomas Walker Gilmer, who became a Member of Congress, and briefly, Secretary of the Navy. Around 1838, Israel married a free woman of color, Elizabeth Farrows Randolph, a seamstress and a widow with several children. When Gilmer was elected to Congress in 1841, Israel negotiated for his freedom, paying the same \$500 that Gilmer had originally paid for Israel. In 1844, Israel obtained a document officially recognizing his freedom and changing his name to Israel Jefferson. Shortly thereafter the family moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, where Israel worked as a waiter on a steamboat and learned to read and write. By 1860 he, his wife, and her two surviving children had moved ninety miles east to Pike County, Ohio, where Madison Hemings and other former Virginia slaves lived. Both Israel and Elizabeth Jefferson were active members of Eden Baptist Church, which played a key role in the Underground Railroad. During this time, Israel regularly returned to Monticello to visit. In 1873 he wrote a personal memoir for the *Pike County Republican*.

Source: Indiana Repertory Theatre

ABOUT MONTICELLO

The Reclamation of Madison Hemings is set on the grounds of Monticello in 1866.

Monticello was the primary plantation of Thomas Jefferson, a Founding Father and the third president of the United States, who began designing Monticello after inheriting land from his father at age 14. Located just outside Charlottesville, Virginia, the plantation was originally 5,000 acres, with Jefferson using the labor of enslaved people for extensive cultivation of tobacco and mixed crops, later shifting from tobacco cultivation to wheat in response to changing markets.

Jefferson's home was built to serve as a plantation house, which ultimately took on the architectural form of a villa. Jefferson designed the main house using neoclassical design principles and reworking the design through much of his presidency to include design elements popular in late 18th-century Europe and integrating ideas of his own. Situated on the summit of an 850 ft-high peak in the Southwest Mountains south of the Rivanna Gap, the name Monticello derives from Italian meaning "little mountain".

Work began on what historians would subsequently refer to as "the first Monticello" in 1768, on a plantation of 5,000 acres. Jefferson moved into the South Pavilion (an outbuilding) in 1770, where his new wife Martha Wayles Skelton joined him in 1772. Jefferson continued work on his original design, but how much was completed is of some dispute. In constructing and later reconstructing his home, Jefferson used a combination of free workers,

indentured servants, and enslaved people.

After his wife's death in 1782, Jefferson left Monticello in 1784 to serve as Minister of the United States to France. During his several years in Europe, he had an opportunity to see some of the classical buildings with which he had become acquainted from his reading, as well as to discover the "modern" trends in French architecture that were then fashionable in Paris. His decision to remodel his own home may date from this period. In 1794, following his tenure as the first U.S. Secretary of State (1790–1793), Jefferson began rebuilding his house based on the ideas he had acquired in Europe.

The remodeling continued throughout most of his presidency (1801–1809). Although generally completed by 1809, Jefferson continued work on Monticello until his death in 1826. At Jefferson's direction, he was buried on the grounds, in an area now designated as the Monticello Cemetery.

Before Jefferson's death, Monticello had begun to show signs of disrepair. The attention Jefferson's university project in Charlottesville demanded, and family problems, diverted his focus. The most important reason for the mansion's deterioration was his accumulating debts. In the last few years of Jefferson's life, much went without repair in Monticello. A witness, Samuel Whitcomb Jr., who visited Jefferson in 1824, thought it run down. He said, "His house



A digital model of Monticello in 1816. This is during the time when Madison Hemings & Israel Gillette were enslaved there.

ABOUT MONTICELLO

is rather old and going to decay; appearances about his yard and hill are rather slovenly. It commands an extensive prospect but it being a misty cloudy day, I could see but little of the surrounding scenery."

After Jefferson died on July 4, 1826, his only official surviving daughter, Martha Jefferson Randolph, inherited Monticello. The estate was encumbered with debt and Martha Randolph had financial problems in her own family because of her husband's mental illness. In 1831, she sold Monticello to James Turner Barclay, a local apothecary, for \$7,500 (~\$264,436 in 2024). Barclay sold it in 1834 to Uriah P. Levy for \$2,500 (~\$89,170 in 2024) the first Jewish commodore (equivalent to today's rear admiral) in the United States Navy. A fifth-generation American whose family first settled in Savannah, Georgia, Levy greatly admired Jefferson and used private funds to repair, restore and preserve the house.

The Confederate government seized the house as enemy property at the outset of the American Civil War and sold it to Confederate officer Benjamin Franklin Ficklin. Levy's estate recovered the property after the war.

Levy's heirs argued over his estate, but their lawsuits were

settled in 1879, when Uriah Levy's nephew, Jefferson Monroe Levy, a prominent New York lawyer, real estate speculator, and stock speculator (and later member of Congress), bought out the other heirs for \$10,050, (~\$308,279 in 2024) and took control of Monticello. Like his uncle, Jefferson Levy commissioned repairs, restoration and preservation of the grounds and house, which had been deteriorating seriously while the lawsuits wound their way through the courts in New York and Virginia. Together, the Levys preserved Monticello for nearly 100 years.

In 1923, a private non-profit organization, the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, purchased the house from Jefferson Levy for \$500,000 (~\$8.97 million in 2024) with funds raised by Theodore Fred Kuper and others.

The Jefferson Foundation now operates Monticello and its grounds as a house museum and educational institution.

Monticello is a National Historic Landmark. It is the only private home in the United States to be designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Included in that designation are the original grounds and buildings of Jefferson's University of Virginia.



A photograph Monticello in the 1800s while it was owned by the Levy family, perhaps around the time that the play is set.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



NAMI CHICAGO

Since 1979, NAMI Chicago has fought for families and individuals impacted by mental health conditions. They promote community wellness, break down barriers to mental health care and provide support and expertise for families, professionals and individuals in Chicago and beyond.



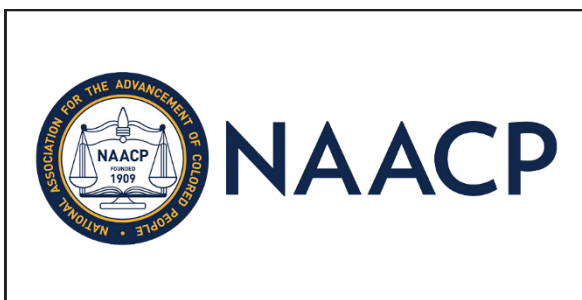
THE FAMILY INSTITUTE AT NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

The Family Institute brings together a diverse group of leading therapists to provide behavioral health care to children, adults, couples and families across the lifespan. They tailor treatment to match the client's unique needs and goals, integrating feedback from clients through measurement-informed care.



NATIONAL AFRICAN-AMERICAN REPARATIONS COMMISSION

The National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC) is a group of distinguished professionals from across the country. They are united in a common commitment to fight for reparatory justice, compensation and restoration of African American communities that were plundered by the historical crimes of slavery, segregation and colonialism and that continue to be victimized by the legacies of slavery and American apartheid.



NAACP

The NAACP is a civil rights organization in the United States, formed in 1909 as an interracial endeavor to advance justice for African Americans. They envision an inclusive community rooted in liberation where all persons can exercise their civil and human rights without discrimination.

ABOUT AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

MISSION

American Blues Theater is an Ensemble of artists committed to producing new and classic American stories that ask the question: “What does it mean to be American?”

VALUES

American Blues Theater *acts* on its values –

Accountability – we hold ourselves and each other responsible to do the right thing.

Courage – we have a fearless mindset and find strength in persevering.

Teamwork – we invest in collaboration and the success of others.

Service – we believe it’s an honor and duty to help the community.

ABOUT US

Winner of the prestigious National Theatre Company Award from American Theatre Wing (Tony Awards), American Blues Theater is a non-profit arts organization that produces high-quality productions with a focus on stories that are relevant, timeless, and inclusive to the American spirit.

American Blues Theater is **committed to developing new work as more than half of the productions are world and Chicago premieres**. Play development programs include the nationally-recognized Blue Ink Award, commissions, readings, and the 16th annual Ripped Festival of short plays.

American Blues Theater **believes in teamwork both on and off-stage**. A leader in community engagement for decades, the theater matches each play’s themes with other non-profits’ missions to raise awareness.

In addition to producing plays, American Blues Theater **offers a range of free services**, including continuing education programs, writing instruction and matinees for Chicago Public Schools, dramaturgical materials, and post-show discussions to widen access in the community.

American Blues Theater and its artists have earned 233 Joseph Jefferson Awards and nominations, 44 Black Theater Alliance Awards, and numerous industry accolades, including nomination and awards for the Pulitzer Prize, Academy Awards, Tony Awards, Golden Globes Awards, Emmy Awards, and more.

UP NEXT AT AMERICAN BLUES



Visit AmericanBluesTheater.com to learn more.



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American Blues Theater sits on the original homelands of the Council of Three Fires (Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa). Read full land acknowledgment at americanbluestheater.com/location.