



Chef James Hemings was Thomas Jefferson's slave and chef from 1784 to 1801. He was one of the most capable and highly trained chefs of that time. He contributed to colonial cuisine. Colonial cuisine includes foods, breads, eating habits, and cooking methods of the Colonial United States. No pictures exist of James Hemmings.

James was born into slavery along with his family. At about age 9, James and his family arrived at Monticello and became President Jefferson's possession. He and his family earned the trust of President Jefferson quickly. President Jefferson trusted and required of Chef Heming's help with many things. Jefferson paid Hemming's more than other slaves and Hemings was dressed in the best clothes. Whenever Hemming would be out in the public, he looked wonderful! Hard work and intelligence made Hemmings very valuable to President Jefferson.

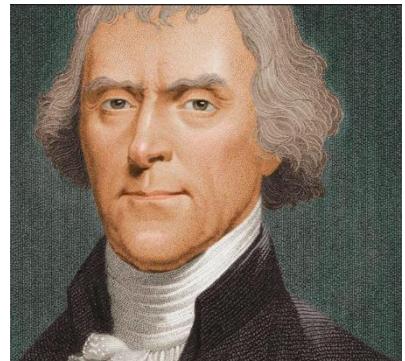
James Hemming's sister, Sally, was an important person to Jefferson as well because she had a daughter with him named Harriet Hemmings. Harriet Hemmings she passed as "white" at the time even though she was half black and half white.

President Jefferson chose to take Hemmings (age 19 at the time) to France in order for him to learn and study French cooking. Chef Hemmings was so intelligent that he became the head chef for Jefferson's residence (Hotel de Langeac) within 3 years of finishing his studies on French cooking. His intelligence and ability to read allowed James Hemmings to function at the American embassy as well. Chef Hemmings made fantastic dishes that were loved by people from all over the world. His food was served to political leaders, artists, scientists, and European upper class called "aristocrats". Chef Hemmings introduced crème brûlée, meringues and French-style whipped cream, European-style macaroni and cheese, ice cream and French fries to America.

Chef Hemmings was paid which is unusual for a slave. This allowed him to hire a French tutor. James learned about a French law that could set him "free". However, James decided to return to America with Thomas Jefferson. After working for President Jefferson in America, Chef Hemmings became more determined to become "free". Chef Hemmings informed Thomas Jefferson and Jefferson agreed to grant him as long as Hemmings could teach his replacement. James taught his brother Peter who replaced him as chef for Thomas Jefferson in February 1796.

As a freeman, James Hemmings worked at a tavern in Baltimore. President Jefferson often wrote James begging him to come back and be his "head chef" again.

Hemmings only lived as a freeman for a short amount of time. His early death shocked many people who knew him including Thomas Jefferson. James Hemming was truly a great culinary artist who pulled ideas from American, African, and French cuisines. Today, James Hemmings stands as a testament as a great Chef in American history.



President Thomas Jefferson