



# Uncommon Allegiances

BORN INTO A NOTABLE VIRGINIA FAMILY OF PATRIOTS, TWO BROTHERS—CAPTAIN HENRY AND DR. MOORE FAUNTLEROY—DISTINGUISHED THEMSELVES IN THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE QUEST FOR FREEDOM.

By Dr. Linda Sundquist-Nassie



**I**n May 1752, Richmond County patriarch William Fauntleroy of Naylor’s Hole, Va., received a letter from one of his daughters’ suitors, 22-year-old George Washington. His daughter, Elizabeth Fauntleroy, called “Betsy” by her family and friends, and suspected of being the woman that Washington had described as his “Lowland Beauty,” had turned down Washington’s proposal of marriage. Washington made one more attempt by writing to Betsy’s father, asking him to intervene and persuade Betsy to rethink her rejection of his proposal.

There is no evidence that William Fauntleroy ever responded to Washington’s plea, many surmising that Fauntleroy did not think Washington worthy of either a reply or his daughter’s hand.

A few weeks after Fauntleroy received the letter, Washington’s older half-brother Lawrence died, and George assumed Lawrence’s position in the Virginia militia and inherited Mount Vernon. Betsy soon chose Bowler Cocke as her husband, uniting two prominent Virginia families.

The case of Betsy and George is a mere anecdote in American history, but it provides a glimpse into the world of a socially prominent but little-known Colonial Virginia family.

## American Scions

The first Fauntleroy to come to the Colonies was Moore Fauntleroy, arriving in Virginia prior to 1651. He purchased a large parcel of land in the Northern Neck region of Virginia from one of the local tribes and was a member of the House of Burgesses from 1644–1659. Of French origin, the Fauntleroy were most likely French Huguenots who came to the Colonies in an effort to leave their religious struggles behind.

The Fauntleroy became successful colonists, supporting their patrician lifestyle through prudent land deals, participation in the trade market and influential marriages. In a 1903 biography of Mary Washington, Sara Pryor rhapsodized about “the country beauty, Apphia Fauntleroy [who] seemed to be loved by all her Acquaintances and Admired by every Stranger.”

For Apphia, her half-sister Betsy and her nine other siblings, marriages into some of Virginia’s most notable families reinforced their social position. Soon that social standing took on a new direction, when many members of the fifth generation of American-born Fauntleroy became Revolutionaries.

## Committed to the Cause of Liberty

Captain Henry Fauntleroy and brother-in-law Thomas Turner, married to Henry’s sister, Jane, suffered through

the winter at Valley Forge. Capt. Fauntleroy died at the Battle of Monmouth and a cousin, Lt. Griffin Fauntleroy, died at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse. John Champe Carter, husband of Apphia Fauntleroy, was taken as a prisoner of war at the Siege of Charleston. Brothers Robert and John Fauntleroy served in the Virginia militia, cousin Dr. Samuel Griffin Fauntleroy served with the Maryland militia, and cousin Moore Fauntleroy served with the dragoons of Pennsylvania.

Although the stories of this family are numerous, the tales of two Fauntleroy Patriots particularly stand out: Capt. Henry Fauntleroy and Dr. Moore Fauntleroy, who served as a Continental Army physician.

### Ultimate Sacrifice

Henry spent the bitter winter of 1777–1778 at Valley Forge with Turner. In late spring, the British advanced in the north, and Washington, anticipating the confrontation, headed to New Jersey with a collection of troops, including Capt. Fauntleroy’s unit.

From the edge of the Monmouth County Courthouse battlefield, Henry spotted a farmhouse and its well. He led his men to it so they could fill their canteens and quench the thirst “arising from their exertions on the hottest day supposed ever to have occurred in America,” according to G.W. Parke Custis, grandson of Martha Washington, in *Recollections & Private Memoirs of George Washington* (1859).

Henry ordered his men to get water first. While waiting his turn, a wayward cannon ball hit him in the hip and “hurled him to the ground a lifeless corpse,” Custis wrote. It was Henry’s 22nd birthday.

Washington was saddened by the loss of his young officer and family friend. Henry and his siblings were first cousins to Washington’s sister-in-law, Hannah Bushrod, who had married his brother, John Augustine Washington.

Two of Henry’s brothers, Robert and John, married the Ball sisters, who were Washington’s second cousins. In a letter to John Augustine dated July 4, 1778, George noted, “Among our Slain Officers is Majr Dickenson, & Captn Fauntleroy, two very valuable ones.”

### A Resolution of Conscience

Meanwhile, Henry’s older brother Moore served as a physician in the Old Richmond and Essex County regions of Virginia, despite his own frail health. As he witnessed the sacrifices Patriots made for liberty, the issue of slavery plagued Moore. By 1781, he resolved to divest himself of slaves.

In his will, he wrote, “I give and bequeath to the blind free Negro Billy Lewis forty shillings per annum during his life. It is my desire that at the end of the year one thousand eight



MARCH TO VALLEY FORGE.

Capt. Henry Fauntleroy and brother-in-law Thomas Turner suffered through the 1777–1778 winter at Valley Forge, Pa.

hundred and two, all my negroes may have their freedom, if it can be effected. But if it can not be, it is my desire that they be hired out in the county, not to be removed out against their Consent, & the money arising from their hires; the one half to be paid to them at the end of the year, in proportion as they hire, the other half the negroes to be cloathed [sic] out of.”

Moore died in 1802. As executor of his will, his younger brother Robert granted Moore’s remaining slaves their freedom and ensured the economic security of many of them, especially the elderly and those unable to move and find work. Then Robert followed his brother’s lead by freeing his own slaves.

One of the freed slaves, Moses Liverpool, moved to Washington, D.C., and found work at the Navy Yard. He met two other free African-Americans, Nicholas Franklin and George Bell. Understanding the need to educate fellow free blacks, in 1807 they created The Bell School, believed to be the city’s first school for free African-Americans, writes Kathryn S. Smith in *Washington at Home: An Illustrated History of Neighborhoods in the Nation’s Capital* (Windsor Press, 1988).

Today, no trace remains of the Fauntleroy home, Naylor’s Hole, or any family gravestones, which were swept away by a late-19th-century flood. But along the river, under the shade of the walnut trees, one can imagine the lives of the long-vanished residents, their love of country and the risks that they were willing to take for liberty. 🍷

---

*Dr. Linda Sundquist-Nassie, author and retired educator, is a member of the Golden Nugget Chapter, Paradise, Calif. The Fauntleroy family were her uncles through their father William, a DAR Patriot who provided supplies to the Continental Army.*