

## James Crowhill Hall

(10 Jan 1805 – 7 Jun 1880)

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**Hall.** In Washington, Monday morning, June 7th, 1880, Dr. James Crowhill Hall, in the 26th year of his age, and for more than sixty years a resident of this city. Funeral services will be held in the Church of the Epiphany on Thursday the 10th inst. at 10 o'clock a.m.

*The Evening Star, June 8, 1880*

### **The Late Dr. Hall**

Dr. James Crowhill Hall, whose death was announced Monday, was born in Alexandria, then a portion of the District of Columbia, July 10, 1805. His father, who was of English birth, was a successful merchant in Alexandria, and carried on a considerable shipping business with Europe. His mother was a Miss Shepherd of an old Virginia family. His father died when the doctor was a child, and his mother removed to Washington that her son might have the advantage of Rev. Mr. Carnahan's classical school in Georgetown. This eminent teacher was afterwards president of Princeton College. His mother about this time was married to the Rev. Mr. Laurie, a popular and eloquent Presbyterian minister of Washington city, with whom she lived happily until her death.

When sufficiently advanced in years and study, Dr. Hall was sent to Jefferson College at Canonsburg, Pa., where he graduated in letters. He then commenced the study of medicine with Dr. Henderson, of Georgetown. Having read over the usual course he attended lectures in the University of Pennsylvania, where he graduated M.D. in 1827. He wrote his thesis for the occasion on the "Physiology of the Brain and Nerves." After receiving his degree he was appointed one of the physicians to Blockley hospital, Philadelphia, where he spent a year in attentive and laborious study. Returning to Washington he opened an office and soon acquired a good practice. He was an expert anatomist, and was on that account, when at college and in the hospital at Philadelphia, chosen by Prof. Gibson to prepare his subjects for demonstration. He dissected the famous case of Axillary Aneurism, reported by Prof. Gibson and referred to in all work on surgery, which was caused by the reduction of a dislocated shoulder that had been out of place for six weeks. Dr. Hall's report on the anatomical or post mortem appearances is published in the 14th volume of the "American Journal of the Medical Sciences," pp. 160-162, March, 1828. The doctor opened a room in the square between 6th and 7th streets on Pennsylvania avenue, for teaching anatomy to medical students. This enterprise was quite successful, and was continued until he accepted a chair in the medical college.

Dr. Hall was one of the original members of the Washington City Gas Light Company, and was one of the first subscribing members and stockholders of the Franklin Fire Insurance Company, in which he has been for many years one of the directors. He was a leader in many of the early business enterprises in the city. He was an early member and one of the directors of the society for the building of the Washington National Monument, but resigned some years since.

Dr. Hall inherited some considerable means, but still better he possessed sound business judgment, and frequently made good investments, buying desirable real estate, which, when it advanced in value, he sold. Of late years he dealt more in stocks, and made his investments through his banker. He was for many years one of the active members of the Washington Library Company, an institution founded in 1812 and chartered two years later. To this library he gave the valuable collection of books which formed the library of the Rev. Mr. Laurie, which he bought from the executors of the estate at the appraisal. Many of these books are now in the Young Men's Christian Association Library.

Dr. Hall possessed an active and inquiring mind, and was never satisfied with a superficial knowledge of any subject, much less one in any way connected with his profession. He was, therefore, not only well informed, but learned in medicine. He was also a fine classical scholar, reading the classics with ease and pleasure. The whole range of the sciences and letters interested him, so that but few persons would appear to better advantage, even among those of the highest culture. He was a man of fine address, and in early professional life inclined to be fond of social intercourse, and was always a welcome guest in the best society. His superior education and the dignified and leading position taken by Dr. Hall led to his election to the chair of surgery in the medical department of Columbian University, in 1830, a position which he filled with great ability until pressure of private business induced him to resign it in 1837. He was a close and intelligent observer and was greatly interested from an early day in the health department of our city, and has frequently been a confidential advisor of the city officials on public health matters.

When the epidemic of cholera in 1832 reached this city Dr. Hall was in full practice, and generously gave his services to all who applied. I have with him looked over his book of charges and names of patients at that time. For days together he visited and prescribed for as many as one hundred patients.

Dr. Hall was the physician who attended most of the cases recurring in that mysterious epidemic of sickness which prevailed at the National Hotel in 1857. Many thought it to be the result of intentional poisoning, but the doctor looked upon it as resulting from sewer gas. The National Hotel was at the time filled with guests, it being the season preceding the inauguration of President Buchanan, when many of the leading statesmen of the country were in the house so that numerous persons from all parts of the country were sufferers. His views of the causes were given to the board of health, and in private letters to leading physicians at a distance.

The doctor was an extensive reader of the best books and reviews up to the time of his death. The latest views of diseases and of new remedies particularly interested him. He was, therefore, in consultations never at a loss to suggest efficient agents that had not been tried in the case. He was a careful and an accurate diagnostician, and the thorough study he had made of the brain and the nervous system made him an authority on all diseases affecting them. In the sick room Dr. Hall was a model physician, possessed of gentlemanly instincts and full of sympathy, clear perceptions of what was essential to be done, and a manner that secured confidence and respect, and which insured the carrying out of his directions to the letter.

From the time he retired from teaching in college until advanced years and impaired health admonished him to retire from practice, Dr. Hall was at the head of his profession in the city of Washington. In his life time he had rendered professional services to more of the eminent statesmen of our country than any other single physician. He was the regular physician to all of the Presidents from Jackson to Lincoln. He was also the medical adviser to most, if not all, of the foreign ministers resident in Washington during that period. During these years he had also an extensive consulting practice, and even after he declined the care of patients, which he announced in a published card, was sought by the physicians for advice in critical cases as long as he would consent to go out to see them in his own room.

For many years Doctor Hall was one of the Trustees of the Washington City Orphan Asylum, founded in 1815 and one of the charities in which his mother had long been one of the most zealous and efficient members. He also took an active interest in and has been a liberal contributor in money to the Children's Hospital, of which he was one of the board of managers since its foundation.

When Mr. W.W. Corcoran made his foundation for the Corcoran Art Gallery, he chose Dr. Hall as one of the trustees. The Doctor was elected president of the board, and has devoted much time and brought to the discharge of the duties of the position a mind well stored with taste and knowledge essential to the success of this noble institution. He was at the Gallery the last time he was out of his house.

The deceased was also a member of the Medical Society of the District and one of its chartered members, and was its president from 1848 to 1850. He was likewise one of the original members of the Medical Association of the District of Columbia and of the Pathological Society of D.C., organized in 1840, and an honorary member of the Clinco Pathological Society formed here in 1865, and a member of the American Medical Association. In these positions he was accustomed to take part in the discussion of medical subjects, but he was always averse to writing or publishing, and thus but few articles from his pen have appeared in medical literature. This proceeded from a peculiar sensitiveness and shrinking from public notoriety, for he was not only a ready but a forcible and elegant writer, as all who have had the pleasure of a correspondence with him will testify. As has already been stated, he acquired a considerable estate, but he might have been quite wealthy even in these times had he collected what his patients were able and anxious to pay him. But he would not make out a bill, even when applied to, and often returned checks sent him on account of important medical services.

Dr. Hall never married. He has a half sister (the wife of Mr. Colgate) residing in this city. She was with him constantly in his last sickness and administered to his comfort. The deceased has been an exceedingly liberal benefactor to all our charitable institutions and to many of his distant relatives living in Virginia, who lost almost all possessions by the war. By his example and counsel he has been a great promoter of the dignity and usefulness of the medical profession.

There are a number of physicians now in good practice here who will always recall the encouragement and aid they have received from him, and which helped so materially to put them in the way of advancement in their profession.

The value that such a life as Dr. Hall's has been is simply incalculable, not only to the medical profession but to all observing persons impressed by virtuous conduct. His counsel was always given in the best interests of a broad and generous humanity. His life work was earnest and noble, and he goes down to his grave honored and beloved as no medical man has ever been in this city.

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*The Evening Star, June 9, 1880*

#### **Respect to the Memory of the Late Dr. J.C. Hall**

The Medical Society of the District of Columbia met last night, Dr. L. Mackall, president, in the chair, and a full attendance of the members present, and adopted resolutions of respect to the memory of the late Dr. J.C. Hall. Drs. Tyler, Young, Lindsley, Toner, Busey, Garnett and Ashford were appointed a committee to draw up a memoir of Dr. Hall. Drs. Tyler, Busey, Toner, Garnett, McBlair and Ashford were designated as pall-bearers, and the society resolved to attend the funeral which takes place from the Epiphany church tomorrow at 10 a.m.

*The Evening Star, June 17, 1880*

The Will of Dr. James C. Hall was filed in the register of wills office yesterday. He makes the Children's hospital and the Washington City Orphan asylum, jointly, his residuary legatees, directing that the sum realized be held intact and denominated "The Laurie Fund." In memory of Mrs. S.B. Laurie, his mother. He gives his medical library and surgical instruments to the Children's hospital, and his miscellaneous library and watch to Mr. James Colegate. He bequeaths to F.B. McGuire and R. Ross Perry, his executors, in trust for his sister, Elizabeth M. Colegate, certain of his real estate in this city, and makes other bequests, as follows: A. McB. Mosher, Cornelia T. Colegate, J. Hall Colegate and G. Gibson Colegate, \$2,500 each; Chas. L. and Wm. McCauley, \$5,000 jointly; Wm. P. Colegate, \$10,000; Grace White, \$10,000; Elizabeth and Emma Rittenhouse, \$5,000 jointly; Corinne Laurie, \$2,500; Louisa Laurie, \$2,500; Mrs. M.R.G. Cabell, \$2,500; Sarah Dade Bull, \$1,000; Emma and Anna Janney, \$1,000; Dr. John

Hunter, \$500; John W. Drew, \$500; James F. McMahon, \$100 and he releases to S.F. Thomas Carpenter all sums due from him. He gives "to my faithful friend and faultless servant, Eliza Dorsey, an annuity of \$250 for life.

*The Evening Star, April 5, 1881*

### **The Laurie Memorial**

By the will of the late Dr. James C. Hall, for many years one of the directors of the Washington Orphan Asylum, a handsome bequest was left the institution to enlarge the building at 14th and S streets northwest, said addition being intended to commemorate the memory of the late Mrs. Dr. Laurie, mother of Dr. Hall. This addition will front on S street 134 feet, and be of three stories the memorial hall being at the east end 48 x 50 feet. In this wing there will be all the conveniences for an infant asylum. The second story will be devoted to dormitories and a nursery, while the third story, with a ceiling twelve feet in height will be used as an infirmary. The memorial building will be faced with press brick and free-stone coignes, a tower corresponding to the one on the 14th street front, the whole building being surmounted by a Corinthian cornice. The window trimmings of the new part will correspond with those of the old. The approach to the main floor will be by handsome brown-stone steps. The roofs will be mainly of slate. The interior, as regards floors and all woodwork, will be treated in polished hard oil. The entire cost will be \$30,000, and it will be completed for occupancy by Christmas next, at which time the managers will give a grand entertainment. Mr. Charles Lemon and Messrs. W.B. Downing A. Brother are the contractors. The cost will be liquidated from the bequest to the assembly by the late Dr. James C. Hall.

*The Evening Star, July 15, 1882*

### **In Memoriam Dr. James C. Hall**

It will be remembered that when the late Dr. J.C. Hall died, a little more than two years ago, he left by will, after providing liberally for all his relatives, a very handsome sum of money to both the Orphan's Asylum and the Children's Hospital of this city. As Dr. Hall was unmarried, and therefore left no descendants to discharge that duty, the directors of the two charitable institutions which were benefitted so largely by his personal interest and attention while living and so munificently remembered after death, thought it due and fitting that they should erect a suitable monument over his grave. Arrangements to that end were set on foot some time ago, and the result has been reached by placing the proposed shaft over his last resting place in Congressional Cemetery a few days since.

Bearing in mind the Doctor's well known simple tastes, and his aversion to display of any kind, the committee in charge of the work were careful to procure such a memorial as would be in keeping with his character and, at the same time, suitable for the purpose in view; and the result is, it is believed, all that could be desired in those respects. The monument, which is of beautiful, unblemished Richmond granite, consists of a broad base in three sections, varying in size, a plinth, and a taper obelisk, the whole reaching a height of nearly twenty-five feet, and forming a structure at once simple and pleasing in outline, harmonious in proportions, impressive in effect, and durable in character.

The four sides of the plinth are highly polished, and that in front or facing the road way bears the following inscription, deeply cut in block or gothic letters, uniform in size and shape throughout:

Erected By  
The Washington City  
Orphan's Asylum  
And The

Children's Hospital  
Of The District of Columbia,  
Jointly,  
To Mark The Grave Of  
Dr. James C. Hall  
Born  
At Alexandria, Va.,  
January 10, 1805  
Died  
At Washington, D.C.,  
June 7, 1880

The design was selected and the work done under the supervision of a joint committee representing the two institutions named, consisting of Messrs. S.H. Kauffmann, Thomas J. Fisher, S.C. Busey, F.B. McGuires and Edward Temple, the whole being executed and erected by Mr. D. McMennamin, of Capitol Hill, whose design and proposal were accepted after carefully canvassing those submitted by similar establishments from Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York and Boston.

*History of the Medical Society of D.C., 1811-1909*

Born Jan. 10, 1805, Alexandria, D.C. A.B., 1823, Jefferson College, Cannonsburg, Penn.; M.D., 1827, Univ. Penn. Incorporator of the Society under second charter. Died suddenly June 7, 1880. While he was an infant his father died; in 1810 his mother remarried. He studied medicine with Dr Thomas Henderson, supra. After graduation was Resident Physician one year at Blockley Hospital, Philadelphia, Pa. 1830-9, Prof. Surgery, Med. Dept. Columbian College, Washington. Member Med. Assn., D.C.; Washington Med. Society; National Institute. Vice President, Patholog. Society. Conducted a private course in practical anatomy at Washington Med. Institute. Gave large bequests to Washington City Orphan Asylum and Children's Hospital. "Family physician of every President of the United States from Jackson to Lincoln. For many years attended the family of every Justice of the Supreme Court; through many administrations the family of every Cabinet Officer; and for a long series of years every foreign legation residing in Washington, and every prominent Senator and member of the House of Representatives, the heads of departments and many honored citizens." See Minutes of Med. Society, June 8, 1880, and April 6, 1881; Boston Med. And Surg. Jour., 1880, CII, p. 621; Trans. A.M.A., 1881, XXXII, p. 506; Busey's Reminiscences, pp. 147, 166.

*Forman, Stephen M., A Guide to Civil War Washington, Washington, DC: Elliott & Clark Publishing, 1995.*

Hall was a physician at Lincoln's deathbed. He testified in defense of Lewis Powell by saying that there were "no signs of mental insanity, but of a very feeble inert mind, a deficiency of mind rather than a derangement of it--a very low order of intellect." According to Hall, Powell could not remember his mother's maiden name upon questioning.