

**HALL, ALICE MARION, 1918-1984**  
**NOVEL, 1960s**

**SKILLMAN LIBRARY**  
**LAFAYETTE COLLEGE**

### **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Alice Marion Hall was born on October 2, 1918 in Brooklyn, New York, the daughter of Rex Cooper Hall and Grace Thompson Hall. She grew up in Dunkirk, New York, attending the New York State Teachers College at Fredonia from 1936-39 and New York State Teachers College at Geneseo from 1939-40, from which she received her BS in Education majoring in Library Science. After four years working in various libraries, she entered the University of Michigan, receiving her Master's degree in Library Science in 1946.

Hall began her academic career as an assistant cataloger at Florida State University in 1946, leaving there in 1951 to become the cataloger at Baldwin-Wallace College in Berea, Ohio. On October 1, 1959 she began working as a cataloger at Skillman Library.

Throughout her career Hall was active in various professional organizations. She served on a number of faculty committees, was a secretary of the Lafayette Chapter of AAUP (American Association of University Professors) from 1965-66, and was a member of the Adrienne Club, a social and service oriented women's group associated with the College. She was also a member of the American Library Association and the American Association of University Women. A longtime active member of the First United Methodist Church, she served on committees and was a dedicated choir member.

Hall wrote many letters to the editor of the *Easton Express*, expressing her conservative political and social views. She enjoyed attending concerts, playing bridge, reading, and traveling. A frequent exerciser, she rode her bike or walked three miles each day.

On March 24, 1984, nearly two months before her retirement, Hall's body was discovered in her Palmer Township residence in Easton, PA. She was the victim of a brutal murder that remains unsolved.

### **SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE**

The collection consists of a 628 page typescript of an unpublished, untitled novel written by Alice Hall. The novel contains 48 chapters and is housed in one box. Although the exact date is unknown, it was likely written during the 1960s since Hall began the novel after coming to Easton in 1959. Her sister, Elizabeth H. Noble, recalled that the novel meant a great deal to Hall. She remembered her sister saying, "I don't know where it came from. I didn't think out the words, they wrote themselves." The typescript was donated by Elizabeth Noble to Lafayette in 1995.

The novel is written in third person and set in an unnamed farm town. The narrative focuses on the town's minister, James Bartlett, and his attempts to help his congregants while dealing with his own personal issues of faith. Several scenes are set in the Bowdlin Club, an exclusive gentleman's club of which James is a member. In an early chapter, James brings Hans Brenner, a

German immigrant working as a janitor, into the club and is reprimanded by a bigoted lawyer named Darius Scobie who wants to maintain the club's exclusivity. A man of high principles, James passionately defends Hans. The Bowdlin Club provides an arena for James to engage in battles of wit and intellect as well as argue questions of religion and social justice with his peers.

When a sinister man named Leonard Wolfe comes to town and tries to persuade the farmers to unionize, James embarks on a mission to convert Wolfe from a Communist into a Christian. Wolfe is an embittered man filled with hatred and resentment, who turned to Communism after a troubled childhood in which he endured cruelty and abuse at the hands of his religiously misguided parents. A staunch anti-communist, James declares that, "it would be a great triumph for the Christian faith if Leonard Wolfe could be defeated – and even converted – by the power and force of Christian love instead of by violently throwing him out of the community." James comes to view the mission as a personal test of faith, staking his livelihood and continued belief in religion on its success.

James delivers an impassioned plea to his congregation to support his "great experiment" to change Wolfe by treating him with kindness. He manages to convince several women to organize a community social to which he invites Wolfe, but things don't go exactly as planned when Wolfe's dance partner, Melinda Tracy, becomes infatuated with him. A rebellious girl, Melinda is easily seduced by Communism and its ideals.

James' efforts to convert the "Commie" are met with distrust and outrage by many townspeople. Several of them accuse James of having Communist sympathies. As his skeptical congregation dwindles, James is often discouraged and seeks counsel from Bishop Arden, whose encouragement bolsters his conviction that he is pursuing a worthy cause in attempting to convert Wolfe.

When Wolfe fails to follow his party's orders, they send gangsters to threaten Melinda and beat him up. Arriving in the nick of time, James intervenes when a fight breaks out. However, the incident causes police to suspect James of being a Communist. Wolfe reveals that he was thrown out of the Party.

Further violence ensues when Wolfe is knifed by a rioter and hospitalized. No longer a Communist, Wolfe's gradual character transformation progresses thanks to Mrs. Martinson, who visits him at the hospital and goes out of her way to "mother" him. After being discharged from the hospital, Wolfe accepts James' offer to stay at the parsonage. Bringing a former Communist into his home draws additional suspicion that James is a sympathizer. Darius Scobie and Lloyd Martins form an organization, the Association for the Protection of Religion, to oppose him. Tensions come to a head when the association holds a meeting and Scobie calls for James' removal from office. The riled-up crowd breaks out in violence and James narrowly evades attack.

In the aftermath of the conflict, James continues to hold a position of non-resistance, and many of his parishioners leave in the wake of the scandal. James becomes very afraid when the evil, powerful Reverend Snyder turns against him. Snyder uses his influence to gather a mob to apprehend James at his house, but James manages to diffuse the angry protestors.

Snyder soon strikes again, this time persuading a gang of hoodlums to set fire to the Martinsons' house. Wolfe miraculously saves Mrs. Martinson from the fire but is unable to save himself. Wolfe's sacrifice convinces many of his former doubters that he was in fact a changed man capable of love. James conducts the funeral ceremony and in the final paragraph asserts that his faith in Christianity has been restored.

### **Partial Character List**

**Bishop Arden** – Mentor to James from whom he seeks counsel about his mission to convert Wolfe.

**Denis Barrie** – Member of the Bowdlin Club. Has a wife, Nancy.

**James Bartlett** – Highly principled minister with a penchant for interfering in the lives of his congregants. At times insecure about his profession and doubtful of his beliefs, James' faith is reaffirmed when his obsessive mission to convert communist Wolfe into a Christian succeeds.

**Geneva Bassett** – Suicidal woman whose life is saved when James convinces her it is worth living. Owes her life to James and frequently sings his praises.

**Hans Brenner** – A gentle, modest German refugee who works as a janitor at a school and at James' church. He lost four daughters in Nazi and Communist prisons.

**Don Field** – A boy who was like a son to James. He is devastated after finding out his father was a thief but with encouragement from "Uncle James" he makes amends with his father.

**Jerome Field** – Don's father. Once a thief but now an honest man who claims that the reason he stole was for the benefit of his son.

**Mrs. King** – James' housekeeper and an excellent cook. She nearly quits her position after losing business due to James' suspected association with the Communist Party.

**Lloyd Martins** – A farmer whose son is killed by Communists in the Korean War. Martins takes out his anger at the Party by opposing James and co-founding the Association for the Protection of Religion to oust James from office.

**Jed Martinson** – Farm owner. Has a wife and two sons, Bob and Joe, who also work on the farm.

**Mrs. Martinson** – Wife of Jed Martinson. She becomes close with Wolfe while visiting him in the hospital and he eventually calls her "Mom." Her kindness allows Wolfe to experience love and he rescues her at his own peril when her house is set on fire.

**Eric Richards** – A doctor and member of the Bowdlin Club.

**Calvin & Henrietta Wolfe** – Leonard's extremely religious parents who abuse him during his childhood.

**Leonard Wolfe** – A tortured man whose traumatic upbringing left him filled with hatred and led to his involvement with the Communist Party. Wolfe attempts to convince the town's farm workers to unionize but nearly all are disgusted by him. He is later rejected from the Communist Party and eventually becomes a changed man thanks to James' efforts to transform him through kindness.

**Darius Scobie** – Bigoted lawyer who wants to maintain the exclusivity of the Bowdlin Club. One of James' biggest rivals who co-founds the Association for the Protection of Religion in an attempt to remove James from office.

**Reverend Snyder** – An evil, powerful man with a deep hatred for Communism. Snyder uses his influence to threaten James.

**Melinda Tracy** – Rebellious teen who becomes involved with Wolfe after meeting him at a dance. She is seduced by the ideals of Communism and threatened by Communist gangsters who use her to get to Wolfe.

#### **RELATED MATERIALS AT LAFAYETTE**

Additional materials about the Hall murder and its possible link to the theft of an Egyptian object from the Lafayette Library can be found in the Special Collections Reference Files.