

Anne Webb

This grand monument in Congressional Cemetery marks the final resting place of Mary Ann Hall.

Mary Ann Hall

Arlington's Illustrious Madam

BY WILLARD J. WEBB

Throughout the 19th Century, Alexandria County, as Arlington was then known, remained a rural area of woodlands and scattered farms. A number of prominent Washington residents owned farms there and used them as country retreats and summer homes. One such person was Mary Ann Hall.

Mary Ann Hall was a prostitute. Obviously attractive, she was also a keen business person. When in her early thirties, she purchased a lot and built a large brick house at the foot of Capitol Hill. There she ran an upscale brothel for more than forty years until her death in 1886.

Mary Ann prospered, and in 1853, she bought an 80-acre farm in Alexandria County. Her brother, the infamous Bazil Hall,¹ owned a nearby farm and, perhaps, acquaintance with that property convinced Mary Ann of the charms of the area. Later she added more acreage to the farm and used it as a summer home and country house for the rest of her life.

Admiral Preston Rixey, the Surgeon General of the US Navy and a friend of President Theodore Roosevelt, subsequently acquired Mary Ann Hall's property and, today, most of the farm is the course of the Washington Golf and Country Club. The main building of Marymount University now occupies the site of Mary Ann's farmhouse.

Mary Ann Hall was born in the District of Columbia, one of nine children.² The exact date of her birth is uncertain. The death certificate issued at the time of her demise in January 1886, lists her age as 71 years, indicating that she was born in 1815.³ But neither the death certificate nor her grave marker in Congressional Cemetery give a date of birth, and the censuses of 1850 and 1860 report her age as 33 and 43, respectively, indicating a birth year of 1817.⁴

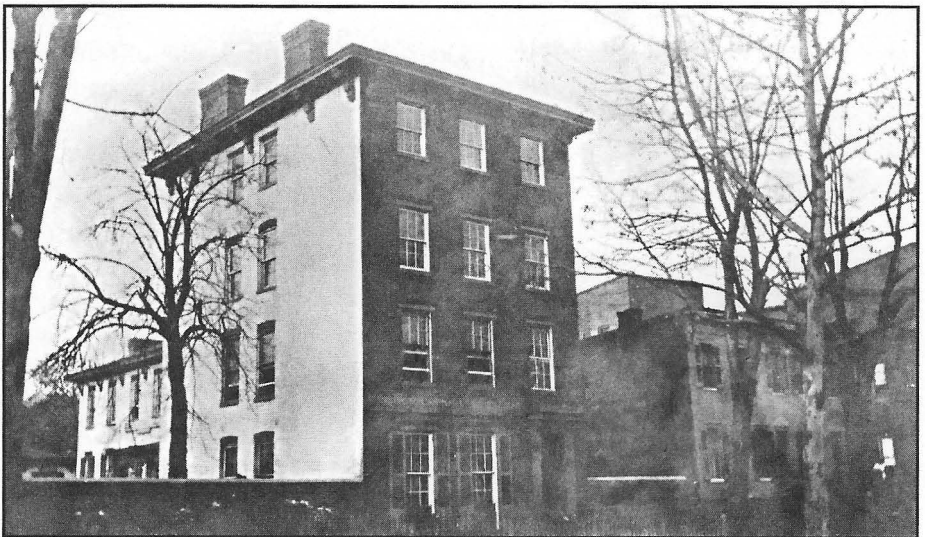
No known photographs of Mary Ann Hall survive, nor did she leave any diaries or memoir. So we know nothing of her early life. Nor do we know how or why she became a prostitute. In any event she did take up the profession and prospered. In August 1839, she purchased a lot in Washington near the Capitol⁵ and quickly built a large brick house. The property, lot 12 of Reservation C, was located at 349 Maryland Avenue, SW, on the corner of Maryland Avenue and 4½ Street. The site is now part of the Mall and the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian has recently been constructed on the site.

Pierre L'Enfant's plan for the Federal City had called for a large ceremonial area to the west of the Capitol, the area that became the Mall. The new Federal

Government did purchase this area but sold portions of the property for private development during the 1820s. The portion on the south side was designated Reservation C, and it was there that Mary Ann Hall purchased the lot. In the 1920s, all the buildings in Reservation C were cleared to complete the Mall, and the site was subsequently selected in the 1990s for the American Indian Museum.⁶

Mary Ann's house built of brick had four stories with a basement. It was a rather grand house with 25 rooms and was enclosed by a brick wall.⁷ The interior was elegantly furnished. The principal rooms on the first floor contained large oil paintings, Brussels carpets, red plush "parlor furniture," etageres, and numerous items of silver plate.⁸

The 1840 Census gives a good indication of Mary Ann Hall's occupation and business. Besides Hall, it shows her household with five white females under the age of 30 and one free "colored" female between the age of 24 and 36. In an era when unmarried women seldom worked or lived outside the home, it clearly suggests that Mary Ann Hall's house was a brothel. The location of the house just at the foot of Capitol Hill where many men passed to and fro on the way to business at the Capitol proved a good site and business thrived. The 1850 Census again showed Mary Ann Hall living with a household of unmarried women all under the age of 30. But, in contrast with the previous census, which gave no occupation for Mary Ann or the women in her household, the 1850 Census reported them all as "substitutes," a polite euphemism for prostitute.⁹



Historical Society of Washington, DC
Mary Ann Hall's notorious Washington DC house.

Further evidence of Mary Ann Hall's house as a brothel was provided by archeological excavations prior to construction of the American Indian Museum. When Reservation C, where Hall's house was situated, was cleared during the 1920s to complete the Mall, all the buildings were removed, but the foundations were merely covered. The careful archeological examination in the 1990s revealed the intact foundation of Mary Ann Hall's house as well as a trash pit next to the foundation.

This trash pit showed a quality of material better than others in the surrounding working class neighborhood. It contained numerous champagne bottles, as well as corks and wire cages from such bottles, and bottles for perfume, personal grooming items, and snuff. Broken ceramics were high-quality porcelain, some gilt edged. Also, coconut shells and berry seeds were found, as well as the bones of beef, pork, poultry, and fish, indicating that elegant meals as well as liquid refreshment were served. Trash pits of neighboring houses, on the other hand, contained mostly beer bottles, and ceramic remains were common tableware of crockery, earthenware, and ironstone. Food remains of other houses showed a limited variety of fruits with pork and chicken as the most common meats—all as would be expected of a working class neighborhood.¹⁰

Mary Ann Hall's business success allowed her to purchase a summer home. In October 1853, she acquired a farm in Alexandria County. It was a tract of 72 acres that included "buildings" and "improvements," which were not identified or described. At the same time she purchased an adjoining eight acres for a total of 80 acres. She paid \$2,400 for her 80 acres, which had once belonged to the Birches.¹¹ Subsequently, in October 1869, she added another adjoining tract of 12 acres, again once Birch land, paying \$1,250 for it.¹² The farm fronted on the road from Alexandria to Chain Bridge, present-day North Glebe Road, the area where Marymount University and the Washington Golf and Country Club are now located. The property was just over a mile from her brother Basil's farm.¹³

Apparently Mary Ann called her farm Maple Grove for the *Evening Star*, in reporting the sale of the property after her death, referred to it as the farm known as "Maple Grove."¹⁴ No other mention of that name has been found. After Admiral Rixey purchased the farm in 1888, he called it Netherfauld.¹⁵ A circa 1905 photograph of Mary Ann's farmhouse survives.¹⁶ It shows a large, two-story structure with a three-story central tower surrounded by a number of large trees—perhaps, the maple grove. The photograph poses a question. The house with the central tower seems to be in the style popular during the 1870s and 1880s. Was this the house on the farm when Mary Ann purchased it, or did she later remodel the existing house or build an entirely new one in the current style? No further information has been found to answer this question.

Mary Ann Hall not only had a summer retreat, but by the time of the Civil War, had acquired four slaves. She demonstrated her keen business acumen when she quickly applied for compensation when slaves were emancipated in the District of Columbia. The law freeing slaves in the District was passed on April 16, 1862, nearly eight months prior to Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, freeing all slaves "in areas still in rebellion." The DC law allowed for compensation to the owners, and three weeks after its passage, Hall petitioned the DC Circuit Court for compensation for her former slaves: Roseanna Gordon, age 24; Roseanna's two daughters, Ann and Alexandra, ages eight and four; and Caroline Lucas, age 23.¹⁷

The Civil War brought many soldiers to Washington and prostitution was rampant.¹⁸ Mary Ann Hall's establishment was one of the best in the city and business flourished. An indication of the reputation of Hall's house is found in an 1862 account in the *Evening Star* of a trial of a woman for keeping a bawdy house. The woman's lawyer, the *Star* related, contended that it was unjust to prosecute his poor client when parties such as Mary Hall and others who "keep the upper ten style of houses of this class" were not prosecuted.¹⁹

The reputation of Hall's establishment is confirmed by a Civil War report of the DC Provost Marshal. It listed various businesses in Washington including hotels, saloons, and bawdy houses. The bawdy house section listed 73 white houses and 17 colored and rated them in classes of one to three, with class one the highest. Mary Ann Hall's was rated a "one" and was by far the largest with 18 "inmates."²⁰

The lawyer's assertion in 1862 that the high-end bawdy house proprietors were not prosecuted did not prove true. In January 1864, Mary Ann Hall's house was raided and she was indicted in the DC Circuit Court with keeping a bawdy house and a disorderly house.²¹ Mary Ann appeared in court, the *Evening Star* reported, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, "in a suit of virtuous black" and was represented by Joseph H. Bradley, Sr., one of the city's most prominent lawyers.²² In reporting the trial, the *Star* mentioned that Hall's establishment had had "a national reputation for the last quarter of a century."²³ This reputation did not influence the jury. While it found Mary Ann not guilty of keeping a disorderly house, it did find her guilty of keeping a bawdy house.²⁴ Mr. Bradley immediately appealed the decision, but the DC Supreme Court refused to hear the case, and Mary Ann Hall paid a stiff fine of \$2,000.²⁵

The Civil War brought other problems for both Mary Ann and her brother Basil. When Confederates burned Basil's house and barn early in the war, it seems likely that Basil with his family took temporary shelter in Mary Ann's farmhouse until he could renovate and expand an existing structure on his farm for a new home.²⁶ In 1862, Congress passed a law levying a direct tax on property in "insur-

rectionary districts within the United States,” and Alexandria County fell in this category. The property of both Bazil and Mary Ann was assessed accordingly. Mary Ann’s farm was appraised at \$16,000 with an assessed tax of \$16.20. As required by the law, she paid the tax in person on November 9, 1863.²⁷

Located on the road between Alexandria and Chain Bridge, Mary Ann’s farm occupied a prominent position in Alexandria County and appeared on Civil War maps of the area.²⁸ Union forces moving to and from the many forts in the area passed continually by and across the farm. The farm had a spring and soldiers probably stopped often for drinks.²⁹ Inevitably problems arose. During her 1864 trial, it was related that she was staying at the farm when soldiers took possession of the house and she had to return to Washington.³⁰ Apparently, damage was done to the house and outbuildings and crops and other stores were taken from the farm.

After the war, in 1871, Congress established the Southern Claims Commission to hear claims of citizens in the south who had “remained loyal adherents to the cause and the Government of the United States during the war.” Ever alert to a financial opportunity, Mary Ann filed a claim in 1872. She asked for an exceedingly large amount of \$26,981 for “quartermaster stores.”³¹ Unfortunately, all documentation on Mary Ann’s claim has been lost, so we can only speculate what the quartermaster stores might have been—possibly crops such as corn, wheat, and hay and foodstuffs such as vegetables and fruit. Since she asked for such a large amount, the claim might have been for wood and timber. It is possible that trees were cut on the property or that the barn and other outbuildings were dismantled with the lumber used at the nearby forts.³² The Claims Commission rarely, if ever, awarded the full amount of a claim, and it reduced Mary Ann’s claim drastically, allowing her only \$2,175.95.³³ Even so, this was a significant amount for the time, and one wonders what she did with the money. She was already well-to-do. Perhaps she used the money to remodel her farmhouse in the latest fashion.

As Mary Ann grew older, she spent more time at the farm and left the running of the business to her younger sister Elizabeth who had always lived with her. The 1880 Census records Mary Ann in Alexandria County rather than the District of Columbia where she appeared in previous years.³⁴

Mary Ann Hall died on January 29, 1886 at her house in Washington after a two-week illness. Her death certificate left the “Occupation” line blank.³⁵ An obituary in the *Evening Star* read: “With integrity unquestioned, a heart ever open to appeals of distress, a charity that was boundless, she is gone but her memory will be kept green by many who knew her sterling worth.”³⁶ Following a “strictly private” funeral, Mary Ann was interred in Congressional Cemetery, the resting place of many Washington notables and Congressmen.³⁷ Her grave monument is one of the grandest, if not the grandest, in the cemetery.

A chaste woman in classical drapery holding a wreath sits atop a large marble pedestal. The inscription reads:

Truth was her motto
Her creed charity for all.
Dawn is coming.

Mary Ann Hall died intestate. She left no debts and an estate of some \$87,000, an amount that equates to nearly \$2 million in today's dollars. The estate included the DC house and the Alexandria County farm as well as personal property, bonds, and securities. Settlement of the estate quickly led to a family dispute. Basil and his brother John, who lived in Prince George's County, felt that their two surviving sisters, Elizabeth and Lavinia, were attempting to take all of Mary's property. The two brothers with their wives brought suit in the circuit courts of both the District of Columbia and Alexandria County to have the estate divided equally. As a result of the case in the DC court, trustees were appointed. The Maryland Avenue house and its contents were sold and other assets liquidated with the resulting proceeds divided equally among the four siblings.³⁸

The advertisement for the trustees' sale of Mary Ann Hall's DC house promoted the large house with its 25 rooms and "all modern conveniences" as suitable for a school or benevolent or charitable institution.³⁹ Following the sale, the house was used briefly, and fittingly, as a women's health clinic and then as a school, the Institution for the Education of Colored Youth. The house continued to be used as a school until 1916 when it was acquired by the Washington Animal Rescue League and was subsequently demolished during the 1920s.⁴⁰

The Hall brothers brought a similar suit in the Alexandria Circuit Court for the sale of Mary Ann's farm and equal division of the proceeds. The files of the Alexandria Circuit Court for the latter half of the 19th Century are in disarray and confusion and not open to the public. Those files are currently being sorted and arranged, but the process has reached only the years of the 1870s. The document initiating the suit over the farm was located, but documents showing the resolution of the case could not be found.⁴¹ Even though the documentation is unavailable, it seems that the case reached the same resolution as the one in the District, for on October 20, 1886, the farm, described as containing 92 acres "handsomely improved" and known as Maple Grove, was sold at auction to Colonel William B. Brocket of Louisiana for \$9,700.⁴²

Two years later Admiral Rixey acquired the Mary Ann Hall farm. He and his family used the house, now called Netherfauld, for summers and weekend retreats. Rixey sold 70 acres of the farm in 1908 to the Washington Golf and Country Club when it moved from its original location near the Alexandria County Courthouse. Meantime, the old farmhouse had burned in 1907. Just after World War I, Rixey built a much larger and grander house on the site of the old one that



Virginia Room, Arlington Library

Mary Ann Hall's spring, near the 14th green of Washington Golf and Country Club.

came to be known as the "Rixey Mansion."⁴³ The Order of the Sacred Heart of Mary acquired the Rixey Mansion in 1948 and founded Marymount College there in 1950. Today the Rixey Mansion, on the site of Mary Ann Hall's farmhouse, serves as the main building of Marymount University.⁴⁴ A spring with a rustic house, known as "Mary Hall's spring," survived near the 14th green on the course of the Washington Golf and Country Club until 1959.⁴⁵

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End Notes

¹ For an account of Bazil Hall's life and activities in Arlington, see Donald A. Wise, "Bazil Hall of Hall's Hill," *Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 7, No. 3, October 1979, pp. 20-29.

² In a lawsuit over the settlement of Mary Ann Hall's estate, her brother John stated that their parents had nine

children. Hall vs. Hall, DC Circuit Court Equity Case No. 10045, 1886, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Files. The 1850 Census gives Hall's birthplace as the District of Columbia. US Census, District of Columbia, 1850, p. 133.

³ DC Certificate of Death, No. 50349, January 29, 1886, Files of Congressional Cemetery, Washington, DC.

⁴ US Census, District of Columbia, 1850, p. 133. US Census, District of Columbia, 1860, p. 933. The 1840 Census did not give the age of Mary Ann Hall.

⁵ Washington DC Deed Book WB 77, pp. 445-447.

⁶ John Milner Associates, Inc., "Archeological Data Recovery, Smithsonian Institution National Museum of the American Indian Mall Museum Site," 20 January 1998, pp. 22-27, 89. (Copy in Martin Luther King Library.)

⁷ Advertisement for trustees' sale of Mary Ann Hall property, 1887, in court documents, DC Circuit Court Equity Case No. 10045, 1887, NARA Files.

⁸ Inventory of Mary Ann Hall's Estate, Milner Associates, "Archeological Data Recovery," Appendix II.

⁹ US Census, District of Columbia, 1840, p. 135. US Census, District of Columbia, 1850, p. 133.

¹⁰ Milner Associates, "Archeological Data Recovery," pp. 111-197.

¹¹ Alexandria County Deed Book No. 6, pp. 510-512.

¹² Alexandria Deed Book No. 9, p. 562.

¹³ Bazil Hall's 327-acre farm was in the area of George Mason Drive between 16th Street North and Lee Highway and included the area of today's Hall's Hill/High View Park.

¹⁴ *Evening Star*, October 21, 1886, p. 4.

¹⁵ Admiral Rixey called the farm Netherfauld and no mention of that name has been located prior to his ownership. Presley M. Rixey, William C. Braisted, and William H. Bell, *The Life Story of Presley Marion Rixey, Surgeon General, U.S. Navy, 1902-1910, Biography and Autobiography* (Strasburg, VA: Shenandoah Publishing House, Inc. 1930), pp. 377, 357-358, 377-378.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 378.

¹⁷ Petition for Compensation, Mary A. Hall to Clerk, DC Circuit Court, May 7, 1862, Entry 33, Emancipation Papers, Record Group (RG) 21, NARA Files.

¹⁸ See Margaret Leech, *Reveille in Washington, 1860-1865* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), pp. 259-269.

¹⁹ *Evening Star*, October 2, 1862, p. 2.

²⁰ "Bawdy Houses," Report of Provost Marshal, Dept. of Washington (DC), 22d Army Corps, 1864-1865, RG 393, Pt. 1, entry 5456 (vol. 298), NARA Files.

²¹ Summons, DC Marshal to Mary Ann Hall, January 14, 1864, Case No. 957, Records of DC Circuit Court, 1864, NARA Files. *Evening Star*, January 15, 1864, p. 2.

²² *Evening Star*, January 15, 1864, p. 2; February 19, 1864, p. 2.

²³ *Evening Star*, February 22, 1864, p. 1.

²⁴ Jury Report, undated (February 19, 1864?), Case No. 957, Records of DC Circuit Court, 1864, NARA Files. *Evening Star*, February 20, 1864, p. 2; February 22, 1864, p. 1.

²⁵ Decision, DC Supreme Court, May 21, 1864; DC Supreme Court Writ, July 11, 1864; Case No. 957, Records of DC Circuit Court, 1864, NARA Files.

²⁶ Wise, "Bazil Hall of Hall's Hill," pp. 22-23. Bazil Hall's original house probably stood on the hill just above where Trinity Presbyterian Church on 16th Street North is located in present-day Arlington. The structure that he refurbished for his new home stood across George Mason Drive from Arlington Hospital, where the Tara Manor development is now under construction, until its destruction several years ago.

²⁷ "Valuation of Land and Lots of Land in Alexandria County for Direct Taxes," with record of payments, undated, Files of Virginia Room, Arlington Library.

²⁸ War Dept., Engineer Bureau, "Defenses of Washington: Extracts of Military Map of N.E. Virginia Showing Forts and Roads," 1865, copy in Virginia Room, Arlington Library.

²⁹ Eleanor Lee Templeman, "The Springs of Arlington," *Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 8, No. 4, October 1988, p. 22.

³⁰ *Evening Star*, February 22, 1864, p. 1.

³¹ Commissioner of Claims, *Consolidated Index of Claims, 1871-1880* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1892), NARA Files. Although Mary Ann's claim was large, her brother Bazil's was much larger. He asked for \$42,450, but was allowed \$10,729. See Wise, "Bazil Hall of Hall's Hill," p. 23.

- ³² Telephone conversation, author with Wally Owen, Curator of the Fort Ward Museum, May 18, 2004.
- ³³ *Consolidated Index of Claims*. Paperwork for allowed claims, which Mary Ann Hall's was considered since she received partial payment, was forwarded to the Treasury Department for payment and often the paper work was not saved. Paperwork for disallowed claims remained with the Claims Commission records and these claims are usually found in the Commission's records in the National Archives.
- ³⁴ US Census, Washington District, Alexandria County, Virginia, 1880. p. 4
- ³⁵ DC Certificate of Death, No. 50349, January 29, 1886, Files of Congressional Cemetery, Washington, DC.
- ³⁶ *Evening Star*, January 30, 1886, p. 5.
- ³⁷ *Ibid*.
- ³⁸ *Hall vs. Hall Documents*, DC Circuit Court Equity Case No. 10045, 1886-1887, NARA Files.
- ³⁹ Advertisement for trustees' sale of Mary Ann Hall property in court documents, DC Circuit Equity Case No. 10045, 1887, NARA Files.
- ⁴⁰ Milner Associates, "Archeological Data Recovery," pp. 79-80.
- ⁴¹ *Hall vs. Hall*, Chancery Case, September 7, 1886, Alexandria County Chancery Order Book C, pp. 315-318. Wesley Pippinger is currently sorting and arranging the Alexandria County Circuit Court records for the Arlington Clerk of the Court. The author is indebted to him for searching and finding this document. The case is referred to in a deed concerning other property, Hall to Hall, August 30, 1887, Alexandria County Deed Book H, No. 4, pp. 532-534.
- ⁴² *Evening Star*, October 21, 1886, p. 4. Alexandria County Deed Book H, No. 4, pp. 535-538.
- ⁴³ Rixey, Braisted, and Bell, *The Life Story of Presley Marion Rixey*, pp. 357-358, 377-379.
- ⁴⁴ Virginia Landmarks Survey Form, "Rixey Mansion," September 1981; Pamphlet, "Rixey Mansion," no date or publication data; Files of Virginia Room, Arlington Library.
- ⁴⁵ Eleanor Lee Templeman, *Arlington Heritage, Vignettes of a Virginia County* (Arlington: Privately published, 1959), pp. 134-135.