

Hall, James King ^[1]

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by John Macnicholas, 1988

28 Sept. 1875–10 Sept. 1948

James King Hall, psychiatrist, was born in [Iredell County](#) ^[2], near Statesville, the son of Dr. Eugenius Alexander and Amanda McCullough Howard Hall. Eugenius Alexander's ancestral line derives from [James Hall](#) ^[3], born in Ireland (ca. 1705), who married Prudence Roddy in 1730. In 1751, James Hall moved his family from Pennsylvania to land then in Rowan (now Iredell) County. They had ten children, one of whom was Alexander Hall, great-grandfather of James King. Alexander's son, Hugh Roddy Hall, established a classical school later chartered as Ebenezer Academy. The father of James King was born in 1839; though he lost part of his hand in active duty in the Confederate Army, he completed his medical studies at the University of Maryland in 1868 and practiced medicine in Iredell County.

James King Hall attended Ebenezer Academy and Statesville High School. In 1897, he entered [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[4] where he distinguished himself by membership in Phi Beta Kappa and the debate club, as president of the Athletic Association, and as assistant editor of *The Tar Heel*. In his senior year he completed the first year of medical school, and in 1901 he was graduated magna cum laude. After finishing the second year of medical school at Chapel Hill, he transferred to Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, receiving his degree in 1904. He served his internship at the Philadelphia Polyclinic Hospital, where he was influenced by a neurologist, William G. Spiller, and a psychiatrist, Francis X. Dercum, to specialize in the nascent field of psychiatry.

When Hall completed his internship, he was invited to join the staff of the North Carolina State Hospital in Morganton. From 1905 to 1911 he remained there as an assistant physician and performed original research under the direction of Dr. Patrick Murphy. In 1911, Hall and two of his associates at Morganton, Dr. Paul V. Anderson and Dr. E. M. Gayle, purchased the country estate of Major Lewis Ginter in Richmond, Va., where they founded Westbrook Sanatorium, the first private hospital in Virginia to specialize in the treatment of emotional illness.

Hall was president of Westbrook from 1911 until his death. Under his guidance it became, in the judgment of Dr. Karl Menninger, one of the most progressive psychiatric hospitals in the nation. Hall believed that the diagnosis and treatment of emotional diseases were as open to scientific inquiry as diseases of the body, and that emotional illness should incur no more social stigma than physical illness. Becoming a vigorous proponent of preventive psychiatry and mental hygiene, Hall campaigned for humane, medically enlightened treatment of criminals. He took an active interest in the relationship between emotional disorder and crime, and sought to supply detention centers with personnel who could treat the psychiatric problems of inmates.

A prolific writer, Hall made his most important single contribution to medical literature as editor of *One Hundred Years of American Psychiatry*. Published by the American Psychiatric Association in 1944, it was a definitive historical document on the subject. From 1919 to 1944 he was a regular contributor to *Southern Medicine and Surgery*, for which he was also an associate editor. Most of his writings were aimed at both professional and general audiences.

Hall stimulated professional intercommunication, especially through his extremely active participation in regional and national organizations. In 1941–42 he was president of the American Psychiatric Association. Also as president he directed the Tri-State Medical Association, the National Association of Private Psychiatric Hospitals, the Southern Psychiatric Association, and the Richmond Academy of Medicine. He was vice-president of the Medical Society of Virginia and chairman of the (Virginia) Governor's Advisory Board on Mental Hygiene. Other societies in which Hall was active included the American Association on Mental Deficiency, American Association for the Advancement of Science, American College of Physicians, American Medical Association, [North Carolina State Medical Society](#) ^[5], Southern Medical Society, Central Neuropsychiatric Hospital Association, Neuropsychiatric Society of Virginia, Virginia Academy of Science, [North Carolina Literary and Historical Association](#) ^[6], and American Prison Association. The University of North Carolina conferred upon him an honorary LL.D. in 1935.

On 29 Feb. 1912 Hall married Laura Witherspoon Ervin of Morganton, the sister of Senator [Samuel Ervin](#) ^[7]. Their union produced three sons: James King, Jr., Dorman Thompson, and Samuel Ervin. Hall was buried in Morganton.

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Additional Resources:

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[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press](#),^[18]

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