

**J.P. HALL JR.,  
like his father,  
rules Clay County**

**with a GOLDEN FIST**  
**BOSS HALL**  
story by susan armstrong



**In his** novel "Cadillac Jukebox," James Lee Burke writes about a rich and powerful man who casts a giant shadow over the lives of the people who reside in a small Louisiana community. Some say the man casting the shadow is honest, charitable, moral. Some say he is corrupt, miserly, evil. But both sides agree on one point — for different reasons, they fear him.

Burke says his character "spent a lifetime floating above the wreckage he had precipitated, seemingly immune to all the Darwinian and moral laws that affect the rest of us."

Burke's story is one that has been told throughout time and throughout the world. The dubious silhouettes may bear different names and faces, but the themes are always the same: money, politics and power.

This is one of those stories, but the characters are living and breathing and cast their shadows across people we know. This is the

story of John Preston Hall Sr., a man who grew up poor and uneducated, but developed an insatiable hunger for wealth and power. It chronicles his relentless, sometimes brutal climb to the top — no matter what the cost, or who paid the price.

This is also the story of what happened when John Preston Hall Sr., the wealthiest and most powerful man in Clay County, handed his son the reins to his Northeast Florida fiefdom.

Now at age 67, J.P. Hall Jr. is indisputably the most powerful man in Clay County — and has been for many years. His shadow looms over the county's political and law enforcement establishments like no other. Capitalizing and, in many cases, building on his father's legacy, J.P. Hall Jr. uses his money and influence to chart the course of Clay County. He is the man behind the infamous county Clerk of Court John Keene, and dozens of other politicians past and present.

Yet unlike his father, Hall prefers to operate behind the scenes — in the shadows.

Even his most public endeavors, two charities bearing his father's name, remain shrouded in secrecy, with details of their sometimes-questionable financial dealings hidden from public scrutiny.

Hall refuses to give interviews or reveal any facts about his life.

"I'm no politician, so I don't have to talk to anybody," he says, before adding a veiled warning. "You better be real careful what you say, because you might have to repeat it later."

His refusal sets the tone for many in Clay County. Of the numerous residents and civic leaders interviewed for this story, only a handful would allow their remarks to be put on the record. When one asks questions about J.P. Hall in Clay County, many take on the look of a toad that has inadvertently hopped onto a busy highway.

Even J.P.'s friends echo Hall's warning. "You better not write anything bad about J.P.," cautions Floyd Carter, a former employee. "He won't like it."

His 208, Hall worked for two of Clay County's wealthiest and most powerful families, the Dowlings and the Shands, helping manage their lumber and farming operations. He gained a reputation as a hard worker and a shrewd bargainer. Hall further endeared himself to the county's elite when he married Pearl Brooker, a beautiful young woman who was loved and admired throughout the little town of Green Cove Springs.

By 1928, Hall had the backing of some of the most influential people in the county. He defeated Elam Weeks and became sheriff on Jan. 8, 1929.

History records Hall as going into office "with a 38-caliber Smith and Wesson revolver, a shiny new pair of handcuffs, a black 1928 Model-A Ford and a determination to clean up the county." But Hall's most formidable force was his deputy, Will Knight, whom he had inherited from Sheriff Weeks.

Knight was known as "the toughest man in the county" and as a "dead shot," because people whom Deputy Knight shot usually died.

With Knight by his side, Hall initially stopped some of the bootlegging in Clay County. But eventually bootlegging and the numbers games, known by the South American name "boleta," thrived. Some began to suspect that their honeymoon with Sheriff John Hall was over. They were right.

As the Depression sucked the life and dreams out of many of the people of the county, Sheriff Hall began to claim the remnants of their shattered lives. He bought their land for a pittance and used prison labor to reap the harvest of their hard work. Hall took control of the Green Cove Springs Bank, which became the beneficiary of money earned from the land and belongings of his friends. He was in league with a small group of businessmen in Green Cove Springs who discouraged the development of any new businesses or industries that would bring new money into town — and possibly diffuse their power.

While the general population decreased from 1930 to 1940, the black population was growing in Clay County. And at the same time, someone began breathing new life into the ashes of a heinous league of hate mongers — the Ku Klux Klan. That someone, according to several sources, was Sheriff John Hall.

A member of one of the county's political families remembers being threatened with bodily harm by Sheriff Hall if he did not join the Klan. A malignant fear filled Green Cove Springs and several tiny communities on the outskirts of town.

Some people defended Hall, saying he was a good sheriff and a shrewd businessman. But others questioned how he had become a millionaire and one of the largest land owners in the county on the small salary of a public servant. They also questioned why Hall's fortune grew

families and that the elements that surrounded the sale of alcohol disrupted their community. Nonetheless, moonshine continued to flow through the city unabated.

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"There was nothing that went on in the county that John Hall didn't know about, or was part of," said Rivers, now 77. "He was a corrupt son-of-a-bitch."

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**It was** 1928, and Sheriff Elam Weeks had worn out his welcome. The word around Clay County was that Sheriff Weeks spent more time protecting the bootleggers and gamblers than he did honest folk.

Sheriff Weeks wasn't the only dark cloud hanging over Clay County. Although the stock market crash that officially signaled the beginning of the Depression occurred in October 1929, serious economic weaknesses had already hit two of Clay County's primary livelihoods: agriculture and the railroad industry. Jobs were scarce and petty theft of food was all too frequent. The people ached for a change — something or someone who could lead them to better times. John Preston Hall was the embodiment of that hope.

Hall was born in Clay County on Aug. 26, 1894. His father died when he was young, forcing him to fend for himself at an early age. In his 20s, Hall worked for two of Clay County's wealthiest and most powerful families, the Dowlings and the Shands, helping manage their lumber and farming operations. He gained a reputation as a hard worker and a shrewd bargainer. Hall further endeared himself to the county's elite when he married Pearl Brooker, a beautiful young woman who was loved and admired throughout the little town of Green Cove Springs.

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as the moonshining and boleta rackets flourished.

Compared to Hall, former Sheriff Elam Weeks began to look like a saint.

Pearl Brooker Hall first gave birth to a baby daughter, but the sheriff longed for a son to carry on his legacy. In 1930, John Hall realized one of his fondest dreams when John Preston "J.P." Hall, Jr. was born.

Sheriff Hall contributed heavily to political candidates throughout the state, and he soon was recognized as a formidable force in Florida politics.

He also gained a reputation for being an unfaithful husband. Eventually, Hall divorced Pearl Brooker Hall and married a young widow named Grace Ivey, who had two small sons.

Although the 21st Amendment ended prohibition in 1933, the people of Green Cove Springs chose to remain a "dry" town. They believed that alcohol destroyed families and that the elements that surrounded the sale of alcohol disrupted their community. Nonetheless, moonshine continued to flow through the city unabated.

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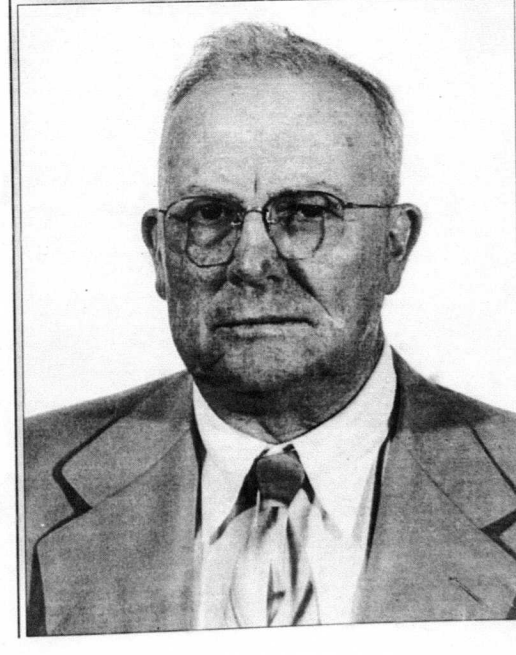
encouraged some local businessmen to start their own police department within the city limits — a force that could enforce prohibition and drive out the boleta men. This would also mean that Sheriff Hall would no longer be the ultimate power within the limits of Green Cove Springs.

The decision to establish a police department could only be made by the mayor, and that was a problem. Ira Thomas, Green Cove Springs' mayor of 40 years, was an important pawn in the sheriff's hierarchy. Thomas had been caught embezzling and had mysteriously made a deal to avoid going to trial. It would take a brave man to challenge Thomas and attempt to break Hall's grip. A small group of businessmen believed Rivers was that man.

In the most furious days of World War II, Rivers had served on a Coast Guard ship as the captain of a gun battery. His battery took three direct hits, and Rivers earned two Purple Hearts and the Medal of Valor for his bravery under fire. Arthur Rivers had seen the face of death, and Sheriff Hall seemed a feeble adversary by comparison.

A covert campaign was launched among black and white residents of Green Cove Springs to get Rivers elected to the City Commission and then appointed as mayor. Some of the same people who had once prayed that John Hall would be elected sheriff now prayed even more fervently to be delivered from his grip. Their prayers were answered. Arthur Rivers received the largest majority of votes in the history of Green Cove Springs and was quickly appointed mayor.

As the Depression sucked the life and dreams out of many of the people of Clay County, Sheriff John Preston Hall Sr. began to claim the remnants of their shattered lives. He bought their land for a pittance and used prison labor to reap the harvest of their hard work. Several sources say he was also the man who breathed new life into the local Ku Klux Klan.



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# BOSS HALL

Rivers recalls the day after the vote, Sheriff Hall was waiting on the street corner for him.

"Arthur, I hope you don't get a big head over that vote you got," Rivers remembers Hall saying.

"Sheriff, I don't wear a hat, but if I did I'm sure it would be several sizes smaller than yours."

"I understand you're going to appoint Sharp Guthrie as Chief of Police."

"Yep. That's the first thing I'm going to do."

"You can't do that!"

derly, sailors were to be turned over to the Navy's shore patrol. Because of his instructions, Rivers was puzzled when the base admiral advised him that the city of Green Cove Springs was suddenly off limits to all Naval personnel because of the large number of arrests within city limits.

"The sheriff's department had no authority inside the city limits," says Rivers. "But I figured that the county deputies were the ones making the arrests, since they were paid by the arrest and by the mile." When Rivers checked county records, his suspicions were confirmed.

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**Knight was known as "the toughest man in the county" and as a "dead shot."**

"John, you got one damn voice the same as anybody else. I'm going to be the mayor and the police commissioner, and Sharp Guthrie is going to be my chief of police."

Rivers walked away, knowing that he had drawn a line in the sand. Word of the altercation blew like a cold wind through town, and the people felt the shiver of an inevitable showdown.

According to Rivers, Louie Carter ran the bootlegging activities in and around Green Cove Springs, and his cousin, Maxie Carter, ran the boleta rackets. As a result of Rivers' and Chief Guthrie's efforts, the bootleggers and number runners quickly found themselves on the defensive.

It wasn't long before Carter approached Rivers in a local restaurant with a lucrative offer. He would pay Rivers to allow the boleta and bootlegging to continue in Green Cove Springs. Rivers adamantly refused, but Carter boldly continued to up the ante. At \$5,000 per month, Rivers ended the offer.

"I'm not for sale Maxie!" Rivers pronounced and walked away.

Rivers began recruiting businesses in Green Cove Spring, and the little town began to prosper. He paved the first streets in the "colored" area of town. People, both black and white, experienced a sense of peace and prosperity long missing in the community. But both were soon in peril.

Green Cove Springs was largely dependent on Navy dollars from the Green Cove Springs Naval Base. In an effort to keep the Navy happy, Chief Guthrie, with Rivers' support, instructed his officers to arrest Navy personnel only for serious crimes. For minor offenses, such as drunk and disor-

Rivers invited the admiral to an emergency town meeting at 7 on a Tuesday evening. At 6 p.m., Rivers' father came rushing to his son's home and pleaded with him to cancel the meeting. Rivers' father said Sheriff Hall had sent a warning — he would not allow Rivers to embarrass him or his department. Rivers "had best cancel the meeting."

"John has all of his special deputies at the Town Hall, and there's going to be trouble," Rivers' father advised his son. But the mayor refused to cancel the meeting, and went to see Chief Guthrie.

"Everywhere John's got somebody," Rivers directed, "I want somebody standing beside them. If they even bat their damn eye, I want to see them hit the floor."

Dozens of residents surrounded Town Hall on that cool fall evening. They knew the time of the confrontation had arrived.

The meeting room was packed, and Chief Guthrie's men filled every corner. The sheriff was sitting in the front row with Deputy "Dead-Shot" seated beside him.

Rivers called the meeting to order, then pulled out a pistol from his jacket and placed it on the table.

"We're going to have peace here," Rivers said, matching the stares of the sheriff.

He then presented evidence that the sheriff's department was responsible for the spate of arrests, and he promised the Navy that arrests for minor offenses would stop within the limits of Green Cove Springs.

"Now is the time, John, if you have anything to say," Rivers challenged. "Not when you get outside." Sheriff Hall left the room hastily, and Navy dollars returned to Green Cove Springs.

"Til the day he died, I heard he still had a warrant for my arrest," Rivers recalls. "But he never served it. He didn't have the guts."

**Despite** the fact that Hall had many enemies, he continued to amass his fortune and power. He contributed heavily to politicians, especially at the state level, and was one of the driving forces behind the Florida Sheriff's Association.

Sam Saunders recalls Hall's role in the founding of the FSA. "John was the only sheriff with any money," says Saunders, a longtime Hall family friend. "So, naturally, he became the chairman and treasurer."

As treasurer of the FSA, Hall regularly traveled across Florida, fraternizing in political and law enforcement circles.

By 1964, Sheriff John Hall, at 69, lost something his money and power could not procure. He had previously had three heart attacks and lost one of his eyes to illness. But even in his weakened state, he could not bear the thought of losing political control of the sheriff's department.

He approached Saunders to run for sheriff against Jennings Murrhee. Long-time residents said that Murrhee's father was one of John Hall's most bitter enemies.

Saunders had served in local government and had been in the state legislature for more than a decade. He had been selected Speaker of the House and was well-respected in Clay County and throughout the state.

But Saunders had no desire to run for sheriff and had already qualified to run for the legislature in '64. He refused John and his son J.P.'s constant pleas to run for sheriff, suggesting that J.P. run instead. But J.P. told Saunders that his father wouldn't let him run — Sheriff Hall didn't think J.P. could win.

Several days before the deadline to enter the race, John Hall — without Saunders' consent — signed his friend up to run for sheriff and promptly launched a media blitz to announce the campaign. Saunders became aware of his own bid for sheriff when he read about it in the newspaper.

Saunders said his elderly mother broke down and cried when she read the announcement. "Don't you do that," she begged her son. "I just can't see one of my children walking around with a gun over his neighbor."

"And I really didn't want to do it," says Saunders. "I didn't have the heart to fight."

But out of respect and friendship for John Hall, Saunders gave up his bid for the legislature to run a disheartening campaign for sheriff.

Jennings Murrhee won the election, thus ending John Hall's 36-year reign as sheriff of Clay County, a state record.

On March 24, 1970, John Preston Hall's shadow faded into eternity, leaving behind a family, a large fortune and an ambiguous legacy.

But Saunders, now 91, gives Sheriff Hall a most gracious eulogy. "John Hall was the smartest man I ever knew. I didn't always agree with what John did, but I still loved him.

**J.P.** Hall Jr. was born on Feb. 17, 1930 and grew up in a large white house in Green Cove Springs, one that pronounced the wealth and importance of the people who lived inside.

At an early age, J.P. seemed to know that the Hall name meant prosperity and

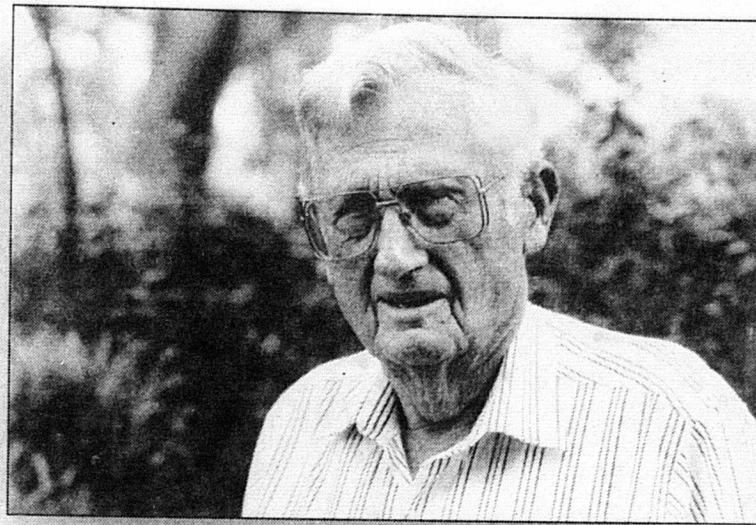


Photo by Walter Coler

**Sam Saunders, a longtime Hall family friend, acted as a surrogate father to young J.P. Hall Jr. during his parents' divorce. When Saunders once asked J.P. how he felt about the new living arrangements, the young boy replied, "I know where the money is. And I'm going with the money."**

privilege, and that his father was one of the most important men in Clay County. J.P. stood in awe of his prominent father, and took every opportunity to trail behind the man he worshipped.

Outwardly, the sheriff's family appeared to have it all: money, influence, and happiness. But fate did not secure a happy life for the Halls. J.P. and his older sister contracted polio, which left J.P. with a serious speech defect. Sheriff Hall was often absent from home, leaving precious little time for his family. When the sheriff divorced Pearl Brooker Hall, J.P. became the object of a custody battle.

Sam Saunders, who had become a surrogate father to J.P., was heartbroken about the split and very concerned about how the situation would affect John Hall's son.

To no one's surprise, Sheriff John Hall prevailed and J.P. went to live with his father's new family in a large house near the Shands Bridge on the St. John's River.

Saunders remembers the day he went to comfort J.P. about his parents' divorce, but J.P. Jr. had already decided his own fate.

When Saunders asked J.P. how he felt about the new living arrangements, the young boy replied, "I know where the money is. And I'm going with the money."

Although Sheriff John Hall had little formal schooling, he had a great respect for education. But, according to friends, J.P. was too busy enjoying his status as a "good catch" at Clay High School to satisfy his father. To instill some of the same respect in his son, Sheriff Hall sent J.P. across the St. Johns River to study at The Bolles Military Academy.

At age 23, J.P. attended the University of Florida for two years, where he was a mediocre student, but a honors-level partier. Sources say the sheriff wasn't enthusiastic about financing his son's follies, so he brought J.P. back to Clay County, where he enlisted for a short stint in the Army.

After his son's return, Sheriff Hall made J.P. his deputy and used his considerable influence to get J.P. an appointment to attend a prestigious F.B.I. Academy course in 1959. But friends of the family say that J.P. didn't like being a deputy, and Sheriff Hall eventually gave him a position in his Green Cove Springs Bank.

Although John Hall apparently controlled many aspects of J.P.'s life, the sheriff had no jurisdiction over matters of the heart. In the mid 1960s, J.P. fell in love with Sue Winchester from

Jacksonville. Those who knew Winchester said she was kind, gentle, a hard worker and drop-dead gorgeous.

But sources say John Hall was furious when he discovered that Winchester was a divorced hairdresser with three small children. Hall believed she wasn't good enough for the future heir to the Hall legacy, and he forbid his son from seeing her. But, according to Saunders, J.P. had plans of his own.

"I'm gonna marry Sue," J.P. told Saunders, "but daddy's gonna raise hell." And raise hell he did.

Saunders said that when the sheriff found out about J.P.'s intentions, he summoned J.P. and Sue to his office.

"He brought them in there and ... said all kinds of bad language," Saunders recalls. "He never did accept Sue."

John Hall refused to attend his son's wedding. Sue Winchester Hall was about to find out what a lot of people in Clay County already knew — if the sheriff ain't happy, ain't nobody happy.

"J.P. never did accept those [step]children because John was so bitter," Saunders remembers. "J.P. tried to go along for awhile, but he'd get a cussing out every day or two about [the marriage]."

Sue Hall won the respect of many in the community. After her marriage to the son of one of the county's wealthiest men, she opened a beauty shop in her home. Despite Sheriff Hall's disapproval, Sue Hall fulfilled her father-in-law's most obsessive desire — heirs to the Hall fortune. But the union was destined to fail.

J.P. divorced his wife on April 4, 1984. Although he was an exceedingly wealthy man, the final divorce decree gave Sue Hall \$1.2 million, the family car and custody of their two sons, but no child support. (J.P. had custody of their lone daughter). The decree stipulated that if either boy ever chose to live with their father, then Sue would be required to pay J.P. \$300 a month, per child, in child support.

**When** J.P. Hall Jr. was 40 years old, he stepped into the still-warm footsteps of the late John Preston Hall Sr. J.P. had always been considered his father's penumbra, that faint, partial shadow that lingers around the edges of the full dark specter. So as J.P. assumed his father's mantle, many of the movers

# BOSS HALL

and shakers in Clay County and around the state watched and waited. They believed he had little of his father's business acumen, so they questioned how he would manage his father's great wealth and power.

big money in Clay County that wants all that power. There are people in Clay County who could buy the influence J.P. has, but they don't give a shit.

"J.P. has always been around and made his political wishes known."

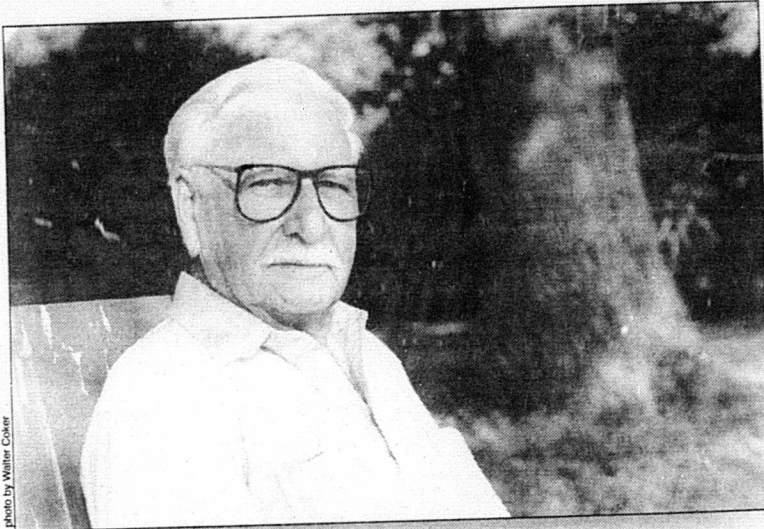


Photo by Walter Coker

**Some Clay County residents question the motives behind J.P. Hall's charitable endeavors. "He has those charities because he wants everybody to forget what his daddy did to this county," says former Green Cove Springs Mayor Arthur Rivers. "But I guess if you have enough power and money, you can buy yourself a favorable place in history."**

But J.P. made up for his relative lack of business knowledge by surrounding himself with talented young men. He sold the Green Cove Springs Bank, and with the expertise of his new associates, made millions with investments in security companies and real estate ventures. Hall's fortune grew, and with it so did his power.

A 1993 poll of local residents and elected officials published in the Florida Times-Union ranked J.P. Hall as the most influential man in Clay County. The combination of his father's legacy and his financial support of local, state and national politicians earned him that distinction.

Although Hall vehemently denies that he is part of the political system (he has never held elected office), he has a seemingly insatiable desire for political fraternization and control. His voluminous campaign contributions have made him a player in politics at virtually every level.

Hall met with President Jimmy Carter in 1975 to discuss the economic problems facing American cities. He was appointed by former Florida Gov. Bob Martinez to serve on the state Ethics Commission from 1987-89, and Hall continues to entertain politicians from across the country at his Green Cove Springs ranch.

But the local level is where Hall wields most of his power. Even with restrictions on campaign contributions, Hall gave approximately \$10,000 to local Clay County politicians during the most recent election cycle, with more offerings appearing in the names of his wife, children and employees.

"Jacksonville has lots of big money that wants things done their way," says one former county official. "But J.P.'s is the only

Hall has been an ardent supporter of Clay County's infamous Clerk of Court John Keene, whose mismanagement of county funds has been an on-going saga dating back to 1992.

Despite Keene's sins, Hall almost single-handedly won Keene the 1996 election. Hall, his family and employees made the largest allowable donations to Keene's campaign coffers.

Five days before the Sept. 3, 1996 election, the Florida Times-Union discovered that Keene used county funds to sue a local citizen who questioned Keene's budgetary skills. But news of Keene's indiscretion was mysteriously withheld until the day after the election — which Keene won by 427 votes. Some believe it was J.P. Hall's influence that silenced the news of Keene's peccadillo. They also believe it is Hall's support that keeps Keene in power.

Sources speculate that Hall's single-minded determination to get Keene elected was, in part, inspired by the fact that Keene's opponent, James Jett, had previously dared to challenge Hall's control of county politics.

Jett refused to comment on his dealings with J.P. Hall, but people inside the county's political system give the following account:

In 1990, shortly after Douglas Anderson was hired as county manager, Hall immediately began to wine and dine him — even selecting a "lady-friend" for the single bureaucrat. But Anderson, who sources say was a "Yankee" not familiar with the "bubba hierarchy" in Clay County, refused Hall's hospitality. Strike one.

Then Anderson began questioning Clerk Keene's financial wizardry in the handling of the county's approximately

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\$70 million budget. Strike two. The final swing came when Anderson disciplined Hall's daughter, who worked in the planning and zoning department, for her excessive absenteeism and less-than-stellar work habits.

Hall reportedly put out the word to county commissioners, and those seeking a commission seat, that he wanted Anderson gone. When Hall called Commissioner Jett to enlist his help in firing Anderson, Jett refused, saying Anderson was the best county manager in years. Jett also told some of the other commissioners that he would expose Hall's bidding at a public meeting if the commission voted to fire Anderson. Anderson was not fired at the time, but Jett did not seek re-election, and when new commissioners were sworn in the following year, Anderson's contract was not renewed.

If Hall has no favorite in a particular race, he reportedly supports every candidate who runs, regardless of political affiliation. Many times his support is given in secret, so the candidates don't realize that Hall is dancing with everybody at the party.

Clay County Commissioner Patrick McGovern was quoted in the Florida Times-Union as saying of Hall's ritual promenade: "He really supports the process more than the person."

But Hall's political do-se-dos have occasionally landed him in hot water. Hall was once investigated for taking free rides aboard Florida Highway Patrol planes.

Hall has also been criticized for his designation as one of five "part-time deputies" in the Clay County Sheriff's Office. Even though Hall had an aversion to being a deputy in his youth, he now enjoys the same enforcement powers as that of any full-time Clay County deputy — he carries a gun, can detain citizens and make arrests. Though these privileges scare some of Hall's foes, records show he has never made an arrest.

Hall is the only part-time deputy with a mobile police radio installed in his black Cadillac, courtesy of the Sheriff's Department, so that he can monitor the department's activities. A spokesman for the Sheriff's Department says that Hall enjoys these privileges because he is "a staunch supporter of law enforcement."

Clay County's patriarch has also demonstrated contradictory conduct in other aspects of his life. He frequently professes his concern for the environment, and in 1992 Florida's Preservation 2000 program bought 4,644 acres of J.P. Hall's land. The program, which has been tagged as welfare for wealthy land owners, is a 10-

year, \$3 billion effort by the state to preserve Florida wilderness.

Hall threw a lavish party to celebrate the state's acquisition of his land — and his acquisition of \$6.5 million of the state's money. Of the purchase, he proclaimed: "This means a lot to the Hall family. The land will stay in its same natural state the way we've enjoyed it since my father bought it back in the late 1940s."

Yet in 1996, when parts of other Hall properties were designated as critical wildlife habitats, he and a group of wealthy Northeast Florida landowners successfully lobbied the Governor's Office to have the designation removed.

If there is one thing for which J.P. Hall is most admired, it is his well-publicized philanthropy. Two charities in Clay County bear his father's name, the J.P. Hall Sr. Charities of Clay County and the J.P. Hall Sr. Children's Charity Bass Tournament. The Charities of Clay County solicits toys and money to buy presents at Christmas for underprivileged children, and the Bass Tournament is touted as an event that raises money to help finance the toy giveaway. While both efforts have been lauded, the Charities of Clay County and the Bass Tournament — particularly the Bass Tournament — have come under close scrutiny.

Although state and national laws regarding charities oblige them to publicly disclose all pertinent financial information, Hall and representatives from both charities refused numerous requests from Folio Weekly to answer questions about the charities' finances. Folio Weekly sought details about how much money each charity raises, where that money is spent and how much of it goes to pay the people who organize charity events.

The fact that both charities have thumbed their collective nose at public disclosure concerns representatives from the state Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the National Charities Information Bureau, agencies that monitor charitable institutions. Both agencies contend that legitimate charities should have nothing to hide.

But do they?

The history of the inception of the J.P. Hall Sr. Charities of Clay County is clouded. Family members told the Florida Times-Union in December 1996 that the charity was started in 1981 by J.P. Hall Sr. This would be quite a feat since, in 1981, Hall Sr. had been dead for 11 years.

Some local residents say the charity was started in 1981 by Sue Ready, a Clay County resident, who wanted to give underprivileged children Christmas presents. In 1989, sources say donations of

# BOSS HALL

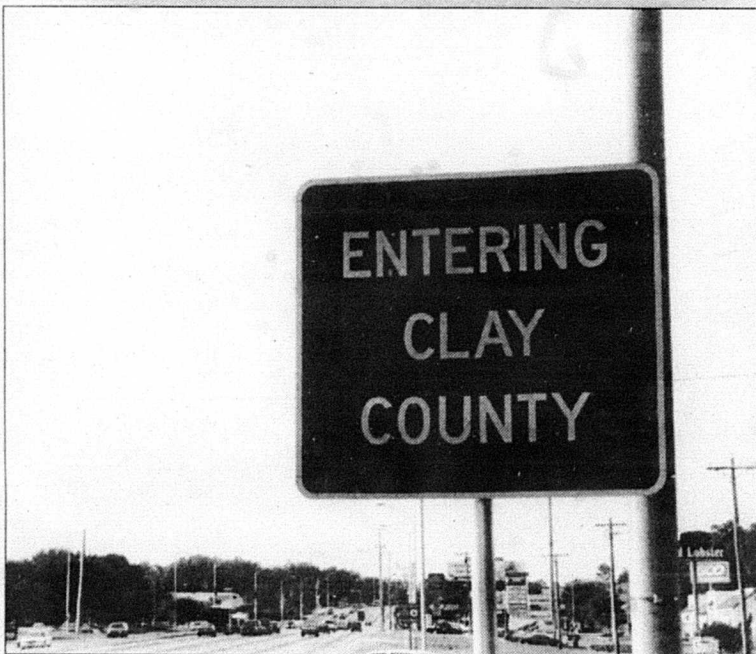
toys and money were slow, so Ready approached J.P. Hall Jr. for a donation. It was suggested that if the charity were to bear Hall's father's name, this would bring more attention and "big money" donations to the charity. Ready agreed, and Hall appointed his daughter to manage the charity. Sue Ready was killed in an auto accident in 1991.

The J. P. Hall Sr. Charities of Clay County says it spends only 5 percent of the money it collects on administration and other fundraising-related expenses. The rest, the charity says in publicity material, is used for toys and services for the children of Clay County.

But records obtained from the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services appear to show that the charity does not report most of its fundraising expenses. For example, the Charities of Clay County does not list any food, beverage or service expenses from its largest fundraiser of the year, a lavish dinner and auction. Several CPAs experienced in charity finances said this is a "trick" that some charities use to make it appear to the public that fundraising expenses are lower than they actually are.

Hall's other charity, the J.P. Hall Sr. Children's Charity Bass Tournament, more closely resembles a political frat party — and is filled with surprises.

**"Jacksonville has lots of big money that wants things done their way," says one former county official. "But J.P.'s is the only big money in Clay County that wants all that power ... J.P. has always been around and made his political wishes known."**



The names of the Board of Directors of the Charity Bass Tournament are a surprise, especially to the board members themselves, some of whom — including Winn-Dixie executive Don Ledford, printer Ronnie Robinson, Jan Rycroft and Jim Price — were not aware they were on the board.

Stephen J. Duval, organizer and financial representative for the Bass Tournament, says he was surprised to learn that the charity, which is supposed to support the toy giveaway, was listed at the state Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services as soliciting funds under the name of the Mathews Foundation for Prostate Cancer Research — a California-based charity with a poor financial record (documents on file with the state show the Mathews Foundation lost more than \$300,000 in 1994). Duval was also surprised to learn that he had returned the renewal information form to Consumer Services with the Mathews Foundation's name typed in bold caps. Duval said that the information was in error.

And the Bass Tournament has other problems. Last year, it was named one of Florida's least responsible non-profit groups after it was revealed that the tournament spent 82 percent of its revenue staging the tournament. Better Business Bureau guidelines recommends that donors give to charities that spend no more than 35 percent of donations on fundraising.

Following this dubious honor, Bass Tournament organizers canceled last year's event.

And to the surprise of many, without Bass Tournament donations, J.P. Hall Sr. Charities of Clay County raised more money than ever before.

Even though he is listed as the president of the Bass Tournament, Hall insists he has nothing to do with the organization. He only "loaned them" his father's name. Hall said in a brief interview with Folio Weekly. Hall said he didn't have much to do with Clay County Charities either, and only signs the group's IRS forms when his secretary asks him to.

Some Clay County residents question the motives behind Hall's charitable endeavors. "He has those charities because he wants everybody to forget what his daddy did to this county," says Arthur Rivers. "But I guess if you have enough power and money, you can buy yourself a favorable place in history."

**Clay** County's shadow occasionally comes to dabble in his various ventures at his office in the First Union Bank of Green Cove Springs. At last report, the walls surrounding him are testaments to his life and power, along with a shrine to the man he so wanted to please, John Preston Hall Sr.

J.P., like his father, married a young widow in 1991 and travels a great deal to Washington, D.C.

New money is moving into Clay County, and powerful men are reportedly casting hungry eyes toward Hall's power base. Hall's children do not appear to have the desire or the stomach to vie for that power, or their father's place in the shadows. And some in the county wait and pray, never having realized that shadows are mere illusions that possess no power over us, except that which we allow them to possess.

And time has apparently answered many of the questions that were posed when J.P. first began his free ride. J.P. Hall Jr. never stepped from the darkness cast by John Preston Hall, choosing instead to float above his father's wreckage his entire life. But, if history is fact, throughout his quest for absolute power, J.P. Hall Jr. also chose to precipitate his own brand of wreckage ... "seemingly immune to all the Darwinian and moral laws that affect the rest of us ..." ♦