

Kevin A. Morrison

GOVERNOR THOMAS GORDON McLEOD AND FIRST LADY ELIZABETH ALFORD McLEOD RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP

As a scholar of British Victorian literature and culture, I have worked in dozens of archives across the Atlantic. I never imagined that one of my projects would lead me to conduct research in the United States. But in the nineteenth century, the United Kingdom and the United States shared a common literary marketplace. The literary works by writers of one country (say, Charles Dickens or Harriet Beecher Stowe) were eagerly consumed by readers in the other. One of the peculiarities of this transatlantic reciprocal exchange was the success of novels of purpose—a literary form created by authors eagerly seeking to effect social change by acting upon their readers—in contexts entirely unimagined in them. Indeed, novels of purpose are written to address a specific set of circumstances. Why might a fictional work that envisions a recreational and educational facility to address the particular needs of the Victorian working classes in London's East End have resonated with a mill owner in Ware Shoals, S.C., for his employees as well as the townsfolk?

In July 2018, I had the privilege of spending ten days conducting research at the South Caroliniana Library as a Governor Thomas Gordon McLeod and First Lady Elizabeth Alford McLeod Research Fellow. My current book project, *The People's Palace Moment: A Cultural History of a Transnational Institution, 1882–1913*, seeks to reconstruct the improbable real-world engagements with Walter Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men: An Impossible Story* (1882). One of the late-nineteenth century's best-selling novels, *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* sought to counter misperceptions of the poor as lazy, criminal, or addicted to drink, and representations of London's East End as a space of radical otherness. It rejected the sensationalism and grotesqueries of extant slum narratives, which depicted the individual subsumed by the crowd. Instead, the novel's protagonists—two wealthy philanthropists who have gone to the East End incognito to learn about the poor—seek to understand the people they encounter and to affirm the dignity of each individual and his or her right to develop all sides of their humanity through the building of a working-class recreational facility that served as a model for similar real-world institutions in London, Glasgow, Brussels, Jersey City, N.J., and Ware Shoals.

My fourth chapter will focus on the construction of a People's Palace in Ware Shoals by Benjamin D. Riegel. Katherine Hall, as Riegel named it in honor of his daughter, was intended to provide entertainments and amenities to the town's citizens, most of whom were employees of the Riegel Textile Company. Construction began in 1912 and was completed in 1913. During my time at the Library, I read issues of the periodical *Ware Shoals Life*; rare histories of the region that cannot be easily obtained through interlibrary loan, such as *From Hill to Dale to Hollow: Ware Shoals, South Carolina*; and pictorial histories of Ware Shoals. I examined materials related to the Riegel Textile Company and of Ware Shoals in the Greenwood County vertical files. I also found it helpful to read through historical South Carolina newspapers, which contained occasional articles on the company and its uses of Katherine Hall.



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Katherine Hall's exterior and interior were quite striking for the period. The Beaux Arts building boasted modern luxuries that are now taken for granted, including indoor plumbing, showers, and water fountains. As an important social venue, Katherine Hall could seat five hundred in its massive auditorium. Over the years, the facility attracted a number of famous artists and performers, such as Roy Rogers and Tex Ritter. The gymnasium, which at the time of its construction was more impressive than any other in the state, was widely enjoyed by employees.

It is still unclear to me whether Riegel read Besant's novel. I have, however, been able to establish that he was an associate of the Congregationalist minister John L. Scudder of Jersey City, N.J., who had not only read and admired Besant's novel but constructed a People's Palace of his own in his state. This much is certainly clear: Riegel took up the novel's central idea that philanthropic schemes had done little to help cultivate the pleasures of mind and body, a necessary condition of human well-being. Thus, in addition to explicating the links between the People's Palace in London and Katherine Hall in Ware Shoals, I am still working out the ties between Scudder's New Jersey institution and Riegel's in South Carolina.

In addition to my time at the Library, I was able to drive up to Ware Shoals on a weekend to explore the area on foot. Although Katherine Hall is now shuttered, I understand that plans are afoot to renovate it. I hope that when my book is published it will contribute to the growing interest in this important aspect of South Carolina history.

I am grateful to Henry Fulmer, Todd Hoppock, and the library staff who made my time in Columbia both possible and productive.