

# HISTORIC RED HOOK

## **Grayson Hall**

1923 – 1985

St. John The Evangelist Cemetery, Barrytown

*Black granite slab, unadorned and purposefully lying flat on the ground, south side of cemetery in back of the church building*

There are roles that actors play that come to define them. For Grayson Hall, whose career spanned parts on main stages, movie sets, and television studios and resulted in an Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actress, that role was probably Dr. Julia Hoffman on the ABC series *Dark Shadows*. Her marriage to writer Sam Hall is one we also remember, given the tombstone she shares with him, etched only with their names, dates of passing, and the name of Wildercliffe, the Rhinebeck home they shared. While some ascribe her year of birth as 1923 and others as early as 1922 and still others as late as 1926, her husband Sam, ever the gentleman, wouldn't confirm the year when asked in an interview with Jorge S. Arango in *Hudson Valley Magazine*, stating his wife would have preferred 1926 to 1923, even after her death. The only birthdate 1978-2012 on the stone is that of Wildercliff, their home, and those are the years they lived there. The house is much older than that, dating back to 1799 (we think) but maybe 1740, Arango points out. The Halls probably would say the years we spend living are far more important than the year they started. Some mysteries endure.

There is one certainty. The simplicity of the engraving on her memorial stone belies the depth of the life Grayson Hall lived. Hall was born in Philadelphia, PA, on September 18, 1923, and died in New York City on August 7, 1985. A memorial to her, written by William Bjornstad and published on FindaGrave.com, states:

*Actress. A career television, film, and stage actress, she is well known for her innovative theatrical performances from the 1960s to the 1980s. She is also remembered for her role as Doctor Julia Hoffman on the daytime Gothic television soap opera 'Dark Shadows,' which ran from 1966 until 1971. Born Shirley H. Grossman, her father immigrated from Latvia and her mother from South Africa. She attended high school in New York City, New York, and became drawn to acting as an escape from a painful childhood. In 1942 she landed her first professional job doing summer stock in Long Island, New York. In 1946 she married fellow actor Ted (Bradbart) Brooks in Los Angeles, California. They separated in 1949 and she returned to New York and married writer Sam Hall*

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*in 1952. Their son, Matthew Hall, was born in 1958. She had always used the stage name Shirley Grayson, but Sam Hall always called her 'Grayson,' and she finally adopted Grayson Hall as her professional name. She had an active stage career in New York City with a role in the controversial Jean Genet play 'The Balcony' for over one year at the Circle in the Square theatre in Greenwich Village and was the longest running off-Broadway play for many decades. She guest starred on various television programs during the mid-1950s, and in 1961 she made her film debut in 'Run Across the River.' In September 1963 she traveled to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico to play the role of Judith Fellowes in John Huston's version of 'The Night of the Iguana,' based on the original Tennessee Williams play, for which she received an Academy Award nomination in the category of Best Supporting Actress and a Golden Globe nomination in 1964. In 1965 she was featured as a kidnapped bank teller in Walt Disney's 'That Darn Cat!.' Her best-known television role was that of Doctor Julia Hoffman, on 'Dark Shadows,' where she portrayed the loyal confidant and friend of the vampire, Barnabas Collins (Jonathan Frid). Other key roles that she played on the show were those of Countess Natalie Dupres, a Gypsy Magda Rakosi, a Mrs. Danvers-type housekeeper, Julia Collins, and Constance Collins, sister of Brutus Collins. She also appeared in both 'Dark Shadows' feature film, 'House of Dark Shadows' (1970, again as Doctor Julia Hoffman), and 'Night of Dark Shadows' (1971), as a new character, housekeeper Carlotta Drake. In 1973 she had a brief stint as reporter Marge Grey on the daytime television soap opera 'All My Children.' She continued acting on stage as Warda in Jean Genet's 'The Screens'(1971 to 1972) and The Lady in Gray/The Fly in 'Happy End' (1977) which co-starred Meryl Streep and Christopher Lloyd. She was in the 1980 US Broadway premiere of 'The Suicide' with Derek Jacobi and appeared opposite Geraldine Page, Carrie Nye and Madeline Sherwood in an Off-Broadway revival of 'The Madwoman of Chailot.' She appeared in the camp classic television film 'Gargoyles' (1972) and the Dan Curtis television film 'The Great Ice Rip-Off' (1974) that featured Lee J. Cobb and Gig Young. She starred in an ABC Wide World Mystery film 'The Two Deaths of Sean Doolittle' (1975) which was written by her husband Sam Hall. Her last onscreen role was that of Euphemia Ralston (Delila's scheming mother) in the television daytime soap opera 'One Life to Live' from July 1982 until April 1983. She died after a six-month battle with lung cancer at the age of 62.*