

Family History McBee

Vardry McBee (1775-1864) was the son of Captain McBee, a Virginian who settled in what is now upper South Carolina prior to 1770. Captain McBee was constable of Tryon County in 1770 and later fought on the Whig side in the Revolution. He owned valuable lands in the Spartanburg district, including Limestone Springs, but lost them shortly after the Revolution, apparently as the result of poor management.

When his father lost the land, circa 1777, young Vardry McBee left school and went to work in the manufacture of lime. In 1793, he went to Lincolnton, NC, apprenticed to his brother-in-law Joseph Morris, to learn the saddler's trade. In 1800, he moved to Charleston, SC, only to return to Lincolnton, then relocate with his family to Kentucky a short time later. He opened a saddle shop in middle Tennessee in 1801, but the following year he returned to Lincolnton to open a store in partnership with John Campbell of Charleston, SC. He sold his interests in this store in 1805.

In 1812, McBee became clerk of court of Lincoln County, NC, a post he held until 1833. In 1815, he bought several thousand acres of land in and around the town of Greenville, SC. In 1817, he built a flour mill there, and, in 1829, he built a second mill. He later added a woolen mill, a cotton mill, and a paper factory. He was an important delegate to the 1833 North Carolina Convention on Internal Improvements. He moved from Lincolnton to Greenville in 1836 in order to be closer to his many business interests there.

McBee became interested in railroads and served as president of the Louisville, Cincinnati, and Charleston project. He subscribed to \$50,000 worth of stock of the Greenville and Columbia railroad, saving the company from extinction and becoming the largest individual subscriber of railroad stock in the United States up to that time. He was also interested in agricultural affairs and was active in the promotion of better agricultural practices. Until his death in 1864, he was a wealthy and influential man in upper South Carolina.

Vardry McBee married **JANE ALEXANDER**, daughter of Colonel **ELIAS ALEXANDER** of Rutherford County, NC, in 1805. The McBees had nine children: Joseph Gallishaw, Malinda Penelope, Silas L., Luther Martin, Hannah E., Martha ("Patsy") Adeline, Vardry Alexander, William Pinkney, and Alexander.

Their son Vardry Alexander McBee (1818-1904) was educated at Pleasant Retreat Academy in Lincolnton and graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1841. He studied law and passed the bar examination, but was never active in the practice of law. He thrice served as clerk of court of Lincoln County and represented the county in the General Assembly in 1861 when he was elected without opposition to fill the unexpired term of his friend John F. Hoke, who had resigned to enter the Confederate Army.

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Vardry Alexander McBee was a successful planter. He owned a large plantation several miles from Lincolnton. In addition, he was active in the construction of plank roads and railroads. He was treasurer of the Wilmington, Charlotte, and Rutherford Railroad Company and had a prominent part in the organization of the Chester and Lenoir Railroad. McBee was active in business, civic, and church affairs of Lincolnton and western North Carolina until his death in 1904.

Vardry Alexander McBee married Mary E. Sumner, whose father was then in charge of the male and female academies of Lincolnton. The McBees had nine children: Jane, Sarah, Mary ("Mamie"), Anne, Martha, Sumner, Silas, Vardry, and Thomas.

Their son Vardry McBee (1860?-1938) was educated at the University of the South at Sewanee, Tenn., and attended a theological seminary in New York. He became an Episcopal priest, but apparently retired from the ministry around 1896, possibly because of ill health. McBee was a gifted musician and was at one time the organist at Trinity Church in New York City. He married Anne Joyce Gwyn, the daughter of James and Mary Lenoir Gwyn of "Green Hill," Ronda, Wilkes County, NC. Anne Gwyn was an artist and apparently made portraits and tapestries for various people around the state.

Additional information about the McBee family and about some of the people whose letters are present in this collection may be found in William E. Sherrill's *Annals of Lincoln County, North Carolina* (1937) and in Thomas F. Hickerson's *Happy Valley* (1940).

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