

McBryde, Archibald ^[1]

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by Benjamin Ransom McBride, 1991

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Archibald McBryde, congressman and state senator, was born in Wigtown, Scotland, the son of James, a farmer, and Janet McMiken McBryde. Because of "the high rent of land," his parents left Scotland in 1775 with their three children, including Archibald, aboard the ship *Jackie* (formerly the *Stanraer*) bound for North Carolina via the port of New York. The family ultimately settled with other Scots in [Cumberland County](#) ^[2], and young Archibald was working on local roads in [Moore County](#) ^[3] by 1787. The death of his father sometime before 1790 shifted the responsibility for taking care of his mother and three sisters to Archibald's shoulders and probably motivated him to reach out for a better life.

In 1790 McBryde was appointed deputy clerk of Moore County, and two years later he became [justice of the peace](#) ^[4] and county clerk (1792–1808) by "unanimous choice." His attainment of these positions by the time he was twenty-six indicates that he must have had excellent educational qualifications for the period, despite the almost complete absence of formal schooling in the region. It is probable that he acquired a basic education through disciplined self-study and private tutors and picked up legal training through association with the educated men who frequented the county courthouse in Carthage.

McBryde early became acquainted with the eminent and respected Ramsey family of adjacent [Chatham County](#) ^[5]. On 10 Nov. 1796 he married Lydia Ramsey, the daughter of John and Sarah Birdsong Drake Ramsey, widow of Matthew Drake. John Ramsey, who was then county clerk of Chatham County, had performed invaluable intelligence services for Governor [Thomas Burke](#) ^[6] of North Carolina during the [American Revolution](#) ^[7]. Young Archibald's association with the Ramseys helped to widen his circle of friends and gain political support from the leading men of the area. Two years after his marriage, he joined Aaron Tyson and Murdock McKenzie in a business partnership selling dry goods under the name of its major stockholder, Aaron Tyson and Company. The firm was highly interested in the development of cheap transportation to expand inland markets from the deep water ports along the coast and invested in the [Deep and Haw River Navigation Company](#) ^[8] and the [Cape Fear River Navigation Company](#) ^[9] to achieve these ends. Periodic lotteries were held to gain public support and capital for these developments but with only limited success. After Tyson's death in 1805, the firm operated under the name of Murdock McKenzie and Company until 1811, when Aaron's son, William Tyson, joined the partnership and it became McKenzie, Tyson and Company. Over time, the business prospered and acquired considerable real estate from debtors who were unable to settle their accounts in any other way. In turn, this land was leased out to others for farming, and the firm began to expand into agriculture.

Despite his business interests, McBryde's primary love was the law, and he developed a successful practice as a lawyer. In 1806 the [North Carolina Assembly](#) ^[10] voted him one of the six state solicitors in the judicial system. This position required considerable travel within the state and increased McBryde's opportunities for making new friends and sampling popular opinion. The political scene of the day had crystallized into two factions—[Republicans](#) ^[11] and [Federalists](#) ^[12]—and in the Fayetteville Congressional District, of which Chatham and Moore counties were a part, the sentiment was almost solidly Federalist. McBryde found common cause with these people, who were mostly small farmers and merchants, a large number of them being Presbyterian Scots whose background and life-style were staunchly conservative. Many of these Scots remembered well their [Tory](#) ^[13] heritage during the [American Revolution](#) ^[7] and, in their eyes, the prominent Republicans of the day were the same anti-Tory radicals who had opposed them in earlier and more bitter days. The Republicans were identified with support for France and the republicanism, liberty, and democracy of the [French Revolution](#) ^[14]. The Federalists, including these Scots, saw this support as the beginning of anarchy, atheism, and poverty and concluded that Great Britain was the only power that could save the United States from the radical ideas of the French Republic. The conservative bent of the Fayetteville District was incompatible with the new Jeffersonian philosophy of equality, and aversion to Jefferson's Embargo Act of 1807 hurried Federalists into Congress.

In 1808 and again in 1810, McBryde was elected from the Fayetteville District on the Federalist ticket and took his seat in the [U.S. House of Representatives](#) ^[15]. For four years (1809–13), he joined other North Carolinians in Congress to vote against President [James Madison](#) ^[16]'s restrictive foreign trade policies and took steps to obstruct efforts of those who were rushing the country into war. On 4 June 1812, when the formal war declaration against Great Britain passed the House, Archibald McBryde was one of a small minority to vote against it. Even after the war began, he voted against measures to continue the conflict.

During North Carolina's political campaign of 1812, McBryde espoused the platform of the "Peace party," which promised no tax increases and an immediate end to the war. The movement was not overwhelmingly popular at the time, but it did bring about the election of a few candidates in the Federalist strongholds, including McBryde, who won a seat from Moore County in the state senate (1813–14). He continued to oppose the war in this capacity until 1814 and the coming of peace. From this time, the Federalists became a defunct political organization.

After leaving the senate, McBryde resumed his law practice. In 1818 he was nominated to fill the vacancy left by Thomas Ruffin ^[17] on the North Carolina Superior Court; however, he withdrew his name from consideration on learning that his longtime friend, Archibald D. Murphey, had also been nominated for the post.

When McBryde's mercantile partner, Murdock McKenzie, died in 1823, no effort was made to continue the business, which by now had amassed considerable real estate in both Moore and Chatham counties. Over the next few years, McBryde continued to work in the legal profession and became involved in several drawn-out cases involving both the private affairs of his clients and estate entanglements stemming from his business partnerships. Many of these remained in litigation for several years after his death.

McBryde was a Presbyterian ^[18] and though ardently proud of his Scottish ancestry, he was devoted to his adopted country. One of his favorite pastimes involved the collection of historical material about the Scots in North Carolina during the American Revolution. In 1822 he made an effort to obtain the diary of David Fanning ^[19], a Tory leader in Chatham and Randolph ^[20] counties during 1780–82, but was curtly rebuffed in this attempt by Fanning himself, who escaped and went to East Florida in 1782. McBryde intended to publish his collections but died at his home, The Grange, near Carbondon before he could complete the task. (Information relating to the date of his death is contradictory. The tombstone inscription of Archibald McBryde in the Farrar Cemetery in Lee County ^[21] gives 15 Feb. 1836; however, several documents in the North Carolina Supreme Court ^[22] records indicate that he was alive as late as September 1836. A statement by his wife, written in June 1841, notes that her husband died in the "month of February 1837.") In 1844 his widow moved to Madison County, Tenn., and settled on land that had been willed to her by her father.

Archibald and Lydia McBryde had eleven children who lived beyond infancy: Jannet (m. William L. Hays), Ann (m. first the Reverend Kenneth McIver and second Green Womack), Mary (m. first Benjamin W. Williams, son of Governor Benjamin Williams ^[23] of North Carolina, and second Dr. Charles Chalmers), James (unmarried), Eliza W. (m. first Dr. Archibald L. McQueen and second James T. DeJarnett), Frances (m. William P. DeJarnett), John R. (unmarried), Sarah T. (m. James Alston), William M. (m. Sarah Grigsby), Archibald, and Sarah T.

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Additional Resources:

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