

McRee, James Fergus ^[1]

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by Jean Poole, 1991

18 Nov. 1794–9 Aug. 1869



An engraving of James Fergus McRee from 1892. Image from [Archive.org](#).

^[2]James Fergus McRee, physician, was born at Lilliput plantation, [Brunswick County](#) ^[3], the son of Major Griffith John and Ann Fergus McRee and the brother of Colone[William McRee](#) ^[4]. He received a medical degree from the Medical College of New York in 1814 and established a practice in [Wilmington](#) about 1819. McRee also studied botany under Dr. Nathaniel Hill in [Wilmington](#) ^[5], specializing in medical botany. He is credited with having introduced to North Carolina such food plants as tapioca, rhubarb, cantaloupe, and artichokes, and he collaborated with [Moses Ashley Curtis](#) ^[6] and [Hardy Bryan Croom](#) ^[7] in botanical investigations.

Participating in local affairs, McRee supported the building of the [Wilmington and Weldon Railroad](#) ^[8] and was one of the organizers of the New Hanover County Medical Society, of which he was also president. He received high praise for his work among victims of a [yellow fever](#) ^[9] epidemic that struck Wilmington in 1821. McRee retired first in 1834 or 1835 and settled at Rocky Point as a planter and a student of botany. He resumed his practice in 1837, however, until a second retirement in 1846.

McRee married Mary Ashe Hill on 14 Nov. 1816. She was the daughter of [William Henry Hill](#) ^[10], one of President John Adams's "midnight judges" and a brother of Dr. Nathaniel Hill, under whom McRee studied botany. They were the parents of two sons: [Griffith John](#) ^[11], the historian, and James F., a physician and surgeon in the Confederate army. McRee was a vestryman of St. James's Church, Wilmington. He died suddenly in Wilmington at age seventy-five.

References:

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Clyde Wilson, "Griffith John McRee: An Unromantic Historian of the Old South," *North Carolina Historical Review* 47 (January 1970).

Thomas F. Wood, "[James Fergus McRee, M.D.: A Biographical Sketch with Portrait](#)"^[12], *North Carolina Medical Journal* 29 (January 1892).

Additional Resources:

Henderson, Archibald. "James Fergus McRee." *Transactions of the Medical Society of the State of North Carolina Diamond Jubilee Seventy-Fifth Annual Session Held At Pinehurst, North Carolina April 30th, and May 1st and 2nd* [N.C.:1928]. 95-101. <https://archive.org/stream/transactions751928medi#page/94/mode/2up> [13]

Wood, Thomas Fanning. *Sketch of the botanical work of the Rev. Moses A. Curtis*. Raleigh [N.C.]: Edwards, Broughton & Co., Power Printers and Binders. 1885. 12. <https://archive.org/stream/sketchofbotanica00wood#page/12/mode/2up> [14]

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