John Morin Gallalee was born May 4, 1883, in Portsmouth, Virginia. He was awarded a master of engineering degree by the University of Virginia in 1911. He received honorary doctor of science and doctor of laws degrees from The University of Alabama in 1938 and 1948, respectively.

Gallalee began his professional career in 1899 as an engineering apprentice in the United States Navy Yard. He began his career in education at The University of Alabama in 1912, as a professor of mechanical engineering, and he admirably served the University for the next 41 years.

In 1947, Gallalee was named president of The University of Alabama. At the time, the College of Engineering had increased its enrollment from 100 to more than 1,000.

Gallalee's administration is noted for numerous achievements, including the expansion and sound financial backing of the Medical College of The University of Alabama and University Hospital; the establishment of the School of Dentistry; the construction of the University Extension Center building in Birmingham; the formation of the Collegiate School of Nursing; the initiation of plans to acquire land essential to the development of the University Medical Center; and the establishment of four doctoral programs at the campus in Tuscaloosa. He is also remembered for renewing the legendary Alabama-Auburn football rivalry in 1948, which had been dormant for some 41 years.

During his six-year tenure as president of The University of Alabama, overall assets at the University increased from $29.5 million to $44.5 million.

Following his retirement as president of the University in 1953, Gallalee moved to Birmingham, Alabama. He continued his engineering profession as a consulting engineer for Southern Services, Inc., where he helped design and build electric power generating plants. He later served as a staff consultant for RUST Engineering Company.

Gallalee contributed greatly to many organizations and endeavors in the engineering, education, and humanitarian fields. He was a member of Phi Beta Kappa, Omicron Delta Kappa, Tau Beta Pi, and the National Society of Professional Engineers. He also served on various boards, including those of the Alabama State Hospitals, Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, and Alabama Museum of Natural History. He was director of the technical staff of the Alabama Building Commission, director of the Army Training Program at The University of Alabama, coordinator of the National Emergency Fuel Program, member of the Committee on Water Resources, and chairman of the Alabama State Board of Registration for Professional Engineers and Surveyors.

The contributions of John Morin Gallalee as an administrator, an educator, an engineer, and a humanitarian have left a lasting mark on both The University of Alabama and the state.

Gallalee died in Birmingham on December 4, 1961, at the age of 78.