

Case Studies of Gillespie Families in Ulster County, New York

1800-1850

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My Goal

I'm a little surprised that it has taken me a year to get around to researching the Gillespie families who were in Ulster County, New York [see my previous article, *Case Studies of Gillespie Families in Dutchess & Orange, New York, 1800-1830*, by Mary Ann Schaefer, 12 Oct 2012].

My primary goal in doing this exercise is to find the following Gillespie's (or their family of origin) who showed up in Michigan and for whom we cannot account in our family line. These Gillespie's include:

- James Gillespie, b. 1772, found in 1850 Michigan
- Thomas Gillespie, b. 1777, found in 1830 Newburgh, NY, presumably same person who migrated to Michigan and died there in 1859
- Elizabeth Gillespie, b. 1787, d. 1857 in Michigan
- Thomas Gillespie Jr., b. 1816 New York, d. 1899 in Michigan
- Isabella E. Gillespie Greer, b. 1813 New York or Ireland, d. 1893 in Michigan
- Mary Ann Gillespie Sloat, b. 1818 New York or Ireland, death unk, presumably MI
- James Gillespie, b. 1819 unk, death 1866 unk, burial in MI, apparent veteran

I am focused for the most part on families who were headed by or had a member named John or James Gillespie, although as you will read, other names do come into the picture.

For the purposes of this article, I am focusing on northern Ulster county locations, namely Kingston, Hurley, Saugerties, Rochester, Rosendale, and Marbletown. While it's clear that places like Shawangunk, Montgomery, and Newburgh were also once part of Ulster county, I will cover those locations in a separate article.

Character Introduction

Previously Mentioned Characters, A Recap

Major John Gillespie

Briefly I will recap the story of Major John (as I will call him here). He came to America with his parents around 1740. His parents were purportedly John Gillespy¹(ie) b abt 1716 in Glasgow, Scotland and Elizabeth Wilkins b abt 1718 in Scotland. Major John was orphaned early on and went to live with his aunt (mother's sister), Martha Hunter, in New Windsor, Ulster, NY. After serving with the English Navy in the French and Indian War, he bought a grist mill in Shawangunk area with his brother-in-law Matthew Smedes. John married Smede's sister, Magdalena, in 1766. He later joined the Fourth Ulster Militia in the American Revolution as part of the regiment from Hanover (which included New Windsor, Hanover, Walkill, and Shawangunk). After the war, he moved to New Windsor where he had a cooperage, a mill, owned a sloop, and was a justice of the peace. When his health began to fail, he moved to Saugerties to be near his son, and he died there in 1810. His wife Magdalena died in 1825. Children of Major John and Magdalena were: John I., Matthew, Benjamin, Elizabeth, Jason, Rachel, and Job².

Major John's descendants appear throughout Ulster and Orange county in the time period I am interested in, so it is important to keep his family in mind.

New Characters in Ulster

This article will essentially attempt to trace and discuss the following family groups:

- A) James Gillespie of Rochester appeared in 1810, could possibly have been in Hurley in 1800
- B) John D. Gillespie + Sarah Smith of Marbletown, first appeared in records in 1818 and was last recorded there in 1855
- C) Alexander H. Gillespie of Marbletown first appeared in Rochester in 1840, next in Rosendale, then in Marbletown; b 1811 NY + Jane Houghtaling, children: John, James, Elizabeth, Walter, Julia or Mary.

I have so far not been able to place the following:

- James Gillespie m. Hannah Merkle, 1841, Rochester

1 It should be noted that references say the spelling of this family name was changed on purpose to distinguish it from other families, and most descendants have kept that altered spelling. I have not kept track of whether this is consistently true.

2 This list might not be exact. There were possibly more than one Gillespie-Ransom marriage: John/James/Joseph Gillespie to Sarah/Sally Ransom.

My Analysis

The following section outlines the new Ulster county characters found in census, deed, probate, and graveyard data. I am not making any attempt to cite my sources exactly at this point – I do that in my family tree when I feel more certain of an established family group.

Thoughts about James Gillespie

First let's talk about the James Gillespie found in 1800 Hurley. Hurley is about five miles southwest of Kingston, which is where Major John Gillespie could also be found in 1800. It is unknown whether these two family groups are related; I have so far not found any connection.

Note that Hurley is different from New Hurley, which is a location close to Walkill.

It can also be noted that this James Gillespie could be the brother of John DeNormandie Gillespie. Even though we don't know the exact vital dates of DeNormandie, we know from his mother's will that he had a brother named James, of whom we know nothing. DeNormandie supposedly married in 1785, and if that is true, then this James seems to be in the same age range to be a brother of DeNormandie.

There were no Gillespie's found in Hurley in 1810, but instead we find James Gillespie who appears in Rochester starting in 1810. At first I thought James-Rochester must be the same person as James-Hurley, but that assumption might not necessarily be so. Here is some evidence which might apply to James of Hurley:

- There were two christening records found for the First Dutch Reformed Church in Rochester, Ulster, NY where James Gillespie and Elizabeth Brown were the parents of Margaret in 1796 and Jennet in 1801.
- There is a graveyard record in the Old Hurley Burying Ground for Elizabeth Gillespie, wife of James, 27 Feb 1809.
- According to findagrave, there is a James Gillespie buried in the same cemetery whose vital dates were 1755-1809. However, this information was according to DAR records, and after searching the DAR genealogy site, I could not find a James Gillespie with these dates.

So possible conclusions from these clues might be:

- James of Hurley was a different person from James of Rochester. If both he and his wife Elizabeth died in 1809, it would be worth figuring out what became of his descendants. One of them, particularly the male who was under 10 years old in 1800 could have been a Gillespie parent in the 1810s.
- James of Hurley and James of Rochester were the same person. In this case:
 - the findagrave information citing DAR dates for a James Gillespie death in Hurley in 1809 is incorrect
 - the 1810 Rochester census is a continuation of the 1800 Hurley family, showing probably Margaret and Jennet previously mentioned, as well as a male born in the 1790s. This same household shows an older female who could be a second wife, which would be consistent with Elizabeth Brown's death in 1809.

Now to look at the family group of James Gillespie in Rochester:

- the History of Ulster County mentions that James Gillespie of Rochester was a merchant
- the 1820 census shows the addition of four children under 10, one male and three females. Any of these could be among the younger missing Gillespie's who later show up in MI (i.e., Thomas Jr. or James-the-Vet, Isabella, Mary Ann). The older male found in the 1820 census is no longer present in this household, but he was old enough that he could have been out on his own by then. In fact, a young couple headed by John D. Gillespie appears in Marbletown in 1820. More will be said about him shortly.
- an 1825 deed names the wife of James Gillespie of Rochester as Margery. The deed mentions a court case and an auction/sale of land where James and Margery were residing. Other names mentioned in the deed include Schoonmaker, Davis, Dupuy, Chambers, and Cantine.
- the 1830 census shows a male in the 60-69 age bracket, so I guesstimate James-Rochester's age at 65, making his approximate year of birth around 1765. The other male from the 1820 census is no longer in the household in 1830, but the wife and three younger females are, the oldest of these in the 15-19 age category, could be either Isabella or Mary Ann.

Thoughts about John D. Gillespie

At this point I want to insert that I think the John D. Gillespie of Marbletown is not the same person as John DeNormandie Gillespie, who I mentioned in my previous article. For one thing, DeNormandie (as I believe he was sometimes called) was older. John D. from Marbletown was probably born 1795 or later, and while we don't have a birth date for DeNormandie, he supposedly married Susanna Bedford in 1785. DeNormandie was a medical doctor who practiced in NYC for awhile, and who I believe can be seen there in the 1810 census. There is a gravestone in Dutchess county where DeNormandie's mother is buried which says John DeNormandie Gillespie died in 1833 at age of 56, which would mean his purported marriage in 1785 is probably not correct. In any case, I submit that the John D. Gillespie of Marbletown, Ulster, NY is probably not the same person as John DeNormandie Gillespie.

The first mention of John D. Gillespie is in 1818 for a christening of daughter Elizabeth at the First Dutch Reformed Church in Rochester. Not only is the location of Rochester of interest, but so is the name of the mother: Sarah Smith. The Smith name has been tied to our Gillespie family back in Armagh, so we can wonder if the some of the Smith family in Armagh also made the migration to America. It can also be noted that an 1827 deed involves John D. Gillespie and wife Sarah along with several others, among them John H. Smith of Sullivan county.

John D. next appears in the 1820-1840 federal census of Marbletown, and again in the 1855 state census (it's not clear where he might have been at the time of the 1850 federal census). He was born in the 1790s, and although I have not done a complete study of every Gillespie household that had a male born in that time frame, when looking in the vicinity of Marbletown, the household of James Gillespie of Hurley and then Rochester seems like a good choice as John's father. If this is so, and based on my previous discussion of James Gillespie of Hurley, John D.'s mother was likely Elizabeth Brown who died in 1809. John D. was a blacksmith. He died in 1857 in Stone Ridge, Ulster, NY (2 miles from Marbletown).

A curious thing about John D.'s household in the 1830 and 1840 census is the presence of an older couple. In both census', the older couple is in the 60-69 age range, so either there were two different older couples in each census, or the age reporting on these census' was not exactly accurate. But who could the older couple be? If we surmise that the older couple was James Gillespie of Rochester, then

he was enumerated twice in 1830, once in Rochester and again with John D. in Marbletown. If this is the case, James Gillespie was likely over 75 years old when he died. Or the older couple living in the household of John D. could be the parents of John D's wife, Sarah.³ This is a question we can't answer at the moment.

We are still learning about the family of John D. Gillespie. It looks like he had at least four sons and five daughters, seven of whom were living with him in the 1840 census, which is after the Michigan migration of our other Gillespie families. Based on his age, John D. is a good candidate to be a father of Thomas Gillespie Jr., however a) the makeup of John D.'s household did not change between 1830 and 1840 when the migration happened, and b) Thomas Jr.'s father's name was reported as James. In the same way, we might think that this household would be an ideal origin for Isabella or Mary Ann. But the ages of the daughters are not quite right, and besides that, most of them have been named: Elizabeth, Rachel, Margaret, Mariah, and Elsie. So while this family group is indeed interesting, we once again find no immediate connections to my Gillespie's of interest.

Thoughts about Alexander H. Gillespie

Alexander H. Gillespie first appeared in Rochester, Ulster, NY in 1840, Rochester being the previous residence of the James Gillespie of Rochester who I am so curious about. This Alexander H. is of the right age to have been the young male found in the household of James-Rochester in 1820.

In 1840, Alexander had three children under 10, and he was married to Jane Houghtaling (a very common name found in the Old Hurley Burying Ground, by the way). Curiously he also has four adults in his household in the 50-59 age category. I have to wonder if these are not parents of the couple, although the age category does not exactly fit to be James-Rochester, who I have already speculated might have been living with John D. Gillespie in 1840. It does seem more likely, however, that James-Rochester would be living in the same town where he had spent much of his life with his youngest son's new family.

By the next census in 1850, Alexander then appeared in Rosendale, Ulster, NY - closer to Marbletown. What's curious about Rosendale is that there were Bodley's there. There is a post on the message boards from somebody looking for parents for Rachel Gillespie who married Peter Bodley, and they suspect maybe John D. Gillespie of Marbletown was her father. Perhaps Alexander H. is also a consideration. In any case, by the time of the 1855 state census, Alexander H. was found in Marbletown along with John D. John D. was older by quite a bit and he was in Marbletown until his death in 1857 at the age of 63. Alexander was also in Marbletown for the rest of his life, and died in 1880.

So even though we cannot yet confirm any familial ties, it appears to me that John D. and Alexander H. were probably the sons of James Gillespie-Rochester.

An interesting side note here is that Alexander H. had a son named James Gillespie who married Elizabeth Wood. The Wood/Woods name has been connected to my Gillespie branch in both Armagh and Quebec.

³ All early references (church records and deeds) refer to his wife as Sarah. Not until the 1855 state census do we see the name Jane. So either Jane is a second wife, or his wife Sarah might have also been known as Sarah Jane.

Concluding Thoughts

At first I was excited because it appeared to me that James-Rochester could very possibly be the father of Thomas Gillespie Jr. as well as one or more of my missing Gillespie females (Isabella and Mary Ann). But after weighing the evidence that Alexander H. was most likely the younger son of James-Rochester, I can only conclude that I am still lacking enough evidence to make any conclusions! At least regarding the particular case studies in Ulster county mentioned in this article, I have still not any definitive connection between NY Gillespie families and my Gillespie line.

This exercise has, however, caused me to look again at my previous case studies in Orange and Dutchess counties, and I am working on another article that will provide updated analysis for those cases, particularly in Newburgh where we believe our Gillespie families were located before migrating to Michigan in the early 1830s.