

Update on Irish Gillespie Research, 2018

Revision 2

By Mary Ann Schaefer

In 2013, we became excited because of correspondence coming from Mr. Diffin in Northern Ireland who is a descendant of Mary Jane Gillespie who married Henry Diffin. Because there were Diffin clues found in our family tree (a Diffin appears in a Quebec census with our James Gillespie family, and an old photo in our family collection is labeled with the handwritten notation “Mrs. Diffin”), we hoped that Mr. Diffin's Gillespie research could help to fill in our own family tree on that side of the pond.

Now several years later, I've taken the opportunity to review once again Mr. Diffin's research. His Gillespie origins definitely seem to point to the townland of Ennislare. To review my own research, we have unarguable evidence in the form of a Michigan deed from Thomas Gillespie of Cavanacaw to John Robert Slater. That deed was dated 1860, but it was recorded in 1872, apparently signed in the presence of George C. Cochrane, solicitor in Armagh. The Thomas Gillespie in Ennislare died in 1865 (see the next, section, Gillespie's of Cavanacaw, [Generation 1](#)). It's difficult to tell if the Michigan deed would have still been recorded in 1872 even if Our Elizabeth's¹ brother, Thomas, had died between 1860 and 1872. I suppose it might still have been recorded after Thomas' death because it would show clear ownership to John Robert Slater. Nevertheless, there is the suggestion here that the death of Thomas Gillespie of Ennislare in 1865 means that he was not Our Elizabeth's brother who recorded a deed in Michigan in 1872.

So where does that leave us? It seems to me that one of the following two premises is true:

- a) Thomas of Cavanacaw and Thomas of Ennislare were two different individuals. If true, it's likely if not probable that both men had sons and grandsons named Thomas Gillespie.
- b) Thomas of Cavanacaw and Thomas of Ennislare were actually the same person, and if so, this Thomas was doing well to be farming in Cavanacaw, Ennislare, and Farmacaffrey. But some how I don't think so, mostly because there were apparently two Thomas Gillespie's born around 1840 -- one married Sarah Woods and lived in Cavanacaw, and the other apparently married Sarah Wilton and lived in town near his sister, Mary Jane Gillespie Diffin. The two younger Thomas' came from different parents methinks, and the evidence says both their fathers had the name Thomas. So I think that supports the first premise, that there were two men named Thomas Gillespie in the same area at the same time.²

While Ennislare and Cavanacaw are not that far apart, I now contend that there were probably two individuals named Thomas Gillespie, one each living in the different townlands of Ennislare and Cavanacaw. While I feel sure that the two Gillespie's were probably related, (the Diffin's do, after all, still have the connections to our family in Quebec), I think it is now more prudent for me to refocus my attention on Cavanacaw.

1 References in this article to Elizabeth or Our Elizabeth refer to Elizabeth Gillespie, 1787-1857. Her probate records in Oakland County, Michigan named her siblings and half-siblings, thus providing a more robust understanding of my Gillespie family.

2 I/we have to leave room for the possibility that Thomas Gillespie of Ennislare and Thomas Gillespie of Cavanacaw were the same person. One person could and did farm in multiple townlands, so we still need to allow for that possibility.

However, before moving on to focus on Cavanacaw, I want to report the following Gillespie marriage records found in Ireland between 1730-1790:³

- 1743, James Gillespie and Elizabeth Armstrong
- 1748, Margaret Gillespie and George Graham
- 1756, Letticia Gillespie, Monaghan
- 1750, James Gillespe and Jane Watson
- 1766, Robert Gillespie and Elizabeth Hamilton
- 1768, George Gillespie and Catherine Marshall
- 1766, John Gillaspy and Jane Maxwell
- 1777, John Gillespie and Ann Gillespie
- 1783, Thomas Gillaspy and Sarah A. Alexander
- 1784, Robert Gillespie and Jane Pringle
- 1784, John Gillespy and Mary Reany

The last record in this list is probably the one that Mr. Diffin found which lead him to consider that John Gillespie and Mary Rainy were possibly the grandparents of Mary Jane Gillespie Diffin, and perhaps they were. But I don't think they were the parents of our family because the marriage date is after the birth of our family's first known child, Nancy Gillespie, born 1780.

3 Found at RootsIreland.com. Assume County Armagh unless otherwise noted. No other information reported on these records. Also note that all these marriages are apparently marriages that were recorded on January 1 for that year. I don't think the marriages all occurred on that date, only that they were somehow recorded on that date.

Gillespie's of Cavanacaw

Generation 1

Our first task is to consider the identity of the man who was the brother of Our Elizabeth Gillespie. The birth years of the known children from John Gillespie's first marriage are from 1780-1787, and they could have extended before and after those years, up to 1805 when John married his second wife. So with regard to Thomas Gillespie, brother of Our Elizabeth, I believe I am looking for an individual who was probably born in the 1780s, and possibly into the 1790s.

Since so many Irish records either never existed or were destroyed, I look for other ways to determine approximate birth years, and so I looked at civil death records which listed ages at time of death. Of course, it is understood that those reported ages were not necessarily accurate, and often were not. But they are what we have to work with.

Here are the deaths I could find for a Thomas Gillespie, making note that a lack of a death record does not mean there were not other individuals of the name Thomas Gillespie who died in County Armagh before 1900.

name: Thomas Gillespie
registration district: Armagh
event type: DEATHS
registration quarter and year: 1865
estimated birth year: 1799
age (at death): 66
died 19 Feb 1865 in Ennislare, farmer, reported by Mary Gillespie

name: Thomas Gillespie
registration district: Armagh
event type: DEATHS
registration quarter and year: 1869
estimated birth year: 1787
age (at death): 82
died 17 Aug 1869 in Tynan, farmer, married, reported by Samuel Gillespie (I think, nearly impossible to read)

name: Thomas Gillespie
registration district: Armagh
event type: DEATHS
registration quarter and year: 1875
estimated birth year: 1785
age (at death): 90
still need to find

name: Thomas Gillespie
registration district: Armagh
event type: DEATHS
registration quarter and year: Oct - Dec 1914
estimated birth year: 1830
age (at death): 84
still need to find, but not likely; more likely applies to the Thomas Gillespie who married Sarah Woods

Of these, I have chosen to insert the Thomas Gillespie 1785-1875 as a placeholder into my family tree as the man who could have been the brother of Our Elizabeth Gillespie. This assumption could well be incorrect, but this individual, whoever he was, would fit into the family group of Our John Gillespie's first marriage. Until I can verify more information about this individual, he seems to be a suitable candidate.⁴

⁴ There is preliminary confirmation that the Thomas Gillespie who died in 1875 was indeed a widower from Cavanacaw. Still waiting to confirm the documentation.

Moving forward, who might that Thomas Gillespie have married? I found a marriage record that might fit his scenario:

Thomas Gillespie, Presbyterian, address and father not recorded married Margaret Johnston, Presbyterian, address Cavanaca, father not recorded on 1 Aug 1815 in the Armagh parish/district.

Immediately following that marriage can be found the baptisms of two daughters:

- Elisabeth Gillespie, b 7 Jul 1816, parents Thomas and Margaret, Cavanacaw parish, baptized in Church of Ireland (CI)
- Mary Gillespie, b 1 Jul 1818, parents Thomas and Margaret, Cavanacaw parish, baptized in CI

Since my focus is Cavanacaw, I am not concerned that these children were not baptized as Presbyterians, especially since we have learned that many Presbyterians in fact baptized their children in CI so that they would be considered legal by the state.

Generation 2

So, what can we learn about these two known daughters of Thomas and Margaret? Here is information which I think applies to them:

- Elizabeth “Eliza” Gillespie married *Alexander Magennis* on 10 Oct 1848 at the 1st Presbyterian Church in Armagh. Her address was Killycoppel Cavana Caw, her occupation was weaver, her father was Thomas Gillespie, witnesses were Samuel Belshaw and James Thomson. Elizabeth died in 1901, and there are a couple ancestry public trees with pictures and more information about her descendants.
- Mary Gillespie married *Samuel Belshaw* on 13 Feb 1845 at the Presbyterian Church at Tyrone Ditches. No other information about the couple was recorded. This is a location that is southeast of Markethill and due east of Loughgilly, an area where I have hypothesized our Gillespie's first settled after emigrating from Scotland, but more about that later. Why do I think this particular marriage belongs to our family? Because the name of Samuel Belshaw shows up over and over as witness to many marriages of Cavanacaw Gillespie's, as we will soon see.

While I have not located baptism records for the following individuals, I believe the following individuals could also have been children of Thomas Gillespie and Margaret Johnston of Cavanacaw:

- Jane Gillespie of Armagh married *John Webster* of Cavanacaw on 29 Mar 1853 at the 2nd Presbyterian Church in Armagh. Jane's father was Thomas Gillespie, so because the groom was from Cavanacaw, I include Jane as possibly belonging to this family group. John Webster made Thomas Gillespie the primary beneficiary of his estate before his death in 1894. Because Thomas Gillespie Sr. had died in 1875, I infer that John Webster left his estate to Jane's brother (supposedly), also named Thomas Gillespie (see following). Jane had the following Webster children: George, Martha, Thomas, Margaret,⁵ John, Sarah Jane. Martha married John M. Graham, and their family emigrated and lived in both Canada and the US.

⁵ Notice naming pattern.

- Sarah Gillespie of Cavanacaw married **George Ferguson** on 31 Jul 1857 at the CI in Lisnadill, her father noted as Thomas Gillespie, witnessed by Samuel Belshaw. I find no other trace of this couple; perhaps they emigrated.
- Thomas Gillespie, b abt 1833 in Cavanacaw, married **Sarah Woods** in 1865, witnessed by Samuel Belshaw. They had the following children from 1866-1877, all associated with Cavanacaw: Margaret,⁶ Archibald, Mary, Isabella, Thomas, Sarah, Jane, John, James, and William. This Thomas Gillespie was last seen at age 78 in the 1911 census of Armagh living with his son Archibald.
- Isabella Gillespie, b abt 1839 in Cavanacaw, married **John Murray** in 1865 at the 1st Presbyterian Church., witnessed by Samuel Belshaw. She had several children and was last seen in the 1901 census in Drumgaw.

This is as far as I can go with the Cavanacaw Gillespie's, but it seems certain there were many descendants to have survived. It would be especially interesting to look for any DNA matches between those descendants and our family groups.

Back-Tracking to Generation Zero

I find the Cavanacaw Gillespie marriage that occurred at the Presbyterian Church in Tyrone's Ditches (Mary Gillespie to Samuel Belshaw) especially interesting. Is that possibly a clue to where the previous Gillespie generation came from?

- It is entirely worth noting that the 1796 Flax Growers list included one John Gillespie in Loughgilly, about 2.5 miles from Tyrone's Ditches. Include also these names in Loughgilly: Isabella Greer, James Greer, and Thomas Greer. This seems a likely place where two Gillespie daughters could have met two Greer brothers.
- Several baptisms of Gillespie's occurred at Tyrone's Ditches Presbyterian Church where the father was William Gillespie: Samuel in 1798, Agnes in 1809, Esther in 1811, Mary Ann in 1814, and Margaret in 1816. None of these names really ring a bell for me, but they certainly seem familiar when it comes to the Pine Bush Gillespie's of New York. Those Gillespie's probably settled in NY long before these dates, probably pre-Revolution, but the names still have some familiarity to my NY research – maybe they had some connection to Tyrone's Ditches?

⁶ Again, notice naming pattern.

Gillespie's in Tynan Parish

I would like to make additional note that Mr. Diffin's research pointed out that many Gillespie's lived in Killylea townland, in Tynan parish, a location that is 6 miles west of Armagh, and about half-way to Emyvale in County Monaghan.

The 1827 tithes recorded in Tynan parish⁷ showed these names of interest:

Gillespie, John	Killylea Town
Gillespie, John	Killylea Townland
Gillespie, Mr.	Killylea Townland
Gillespie, Robert	Killylea Town
Gillespie, William	Killylea Town
Greer, Robert	Killylea Town
Woods, Archibald	Killylea Townland

Again, we find a location where both of the names Gillespie and Greer appear in the same place at the same time. However this time is over a decade after the Greer-Gillespie couples married and left for NY. Moreover, my further research shows that all the Gillespie's in Tynan parish records were associated with the Church of Ireland – no indications of Presbyterianism in those families that I have found.

So I think it is worth keeping the awareness of Killylea Gillespie's and their proximity to both Armagh and Emyvale. We are, after all, still trying to understand the movements of our progenitor, John Gillespie. It would seem that his life in his first marriage may have centered around the areas of Drumgaw, Cavanacaw, and possibly down as far as Loughgilly. After his second marriage, he had a son born in Emyvale who later married back in Lisnadill. There was certainly a good deal of movement in this family group, but what was causing that movement? And more to the question, where did our John Gillespie come from, who was his first wife, and what ultimately became of him?

References

“[Armagh Gillespie Locations](#)” Schaefer, March, 2018

“[Gillespie Place Timeline](#)” Schaefer, March 2018

[Church of Ireland Parish Registers](#)

⁷ See <http://www.connorsgenealogy.com/Armagh/TynanTithes.htm>