

Case Studies of Grier/Greer Families in Dutchess & Orange, New York 1800-1830

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This article is meant to accompany another article I wrote, *Background for Researching Greer & Gillespie Families in Orange & Dutchess Counties, New York, 1800-1830*. While the previous article discusses “positive” details of my research, meaning those details that can be or might be, based on educated speculation, directly associated with my family group, this article discusses the “negative” results of my research, which is to say, here are all the rocks I have turned over and none of my family group have been found hiding underneath there. Nevertheless, this “negative” strategy is a method I learned from doing Sudoku puzzles, which is to say one can often figure out what something is by figuring out what it is not. Sometimes it's a simple process of elimination.

This article therefore summarizes my “negative” research done to date for Grier/Greer families found in Dutchess and Orange counties in New York during 1800-1830, and a similar summary can be found in a separate article I wrote for the Gillespie family. The sources I have searched include federal and state census, probate records, deed records, gravestone records, as well as online family trees and databases. It should be noted there are two record types where I have not spent a lot of time: immigration (passenger lists or naturalization records), or military records. It remains a BIG question in my mind how the Greer and Gillespie families of my branch got along in the new world as it appears they were arriving on the cusp of the War of 1812, which to my understanding was a defining war for our country. How would Scot-Irish families be regarded, coming as they did from the British Isles? Were they required to sign an oath of allegiance? Were they regarded as aliens and deported as such (meaning they emigrated a second time)? There is much about this time period that I cannot easily associate with my NY Grier-Gillespie's, so it's an ongoing question as I do my research.

The research and case studies presented in this article are a work in progress, which I admit is not complete at this point. I furthermore cannot testify that there are not erroneous statements to be found herein. Nevertheless I hope that other researchers might read these articles and see clues or associations based on their experience or knowledge about these or related families who lived in these regions (Dutchess and Orange) during these times (1800-1830).

Research Summary

To quickly summarize from my previous article, I am looking for the surname GREER (early spellings seem to consistently be GRIER). Specifically I am interested in finding two Greer couples where the Greer's were brothers and who were both married to Gillespie sisters, their marriages probably occurring back in Ireland, thought to be County Armagh. One such couple has been identified as James Greer and Jane Gillespie Greer, who probably arrived in New York area between 1806-1812, and lived in the Pleasant Valley area of Dutchess County where they attended the Pleasant Valley Presbyterian church and had several children christened there. I have not been able to yet identify the second Greer-Gillespie couple, but believe the second Gillespie sister's name was Nancy (known to be a sister of

Jane), who was first married to a Greer although we're not sure who that person was or if he was a brother of James Greer.

I believe these particular Greer's lived first in Dutchess County in the 1810-1825 time frame, and then they moved across the river to Orange County before migrating to Michigan around 1832. Another name, Joseph Greer, who seems to have close family ties to my Greer-Gillespie relations also came to the New York area (probably at some point later than James Greer) and also made the migration to Michigan.

Census Records

The first records I have checked are census records from 1800-1830, and here is the summary of what I found:

1800	Jane Grier in Rhinebeck, Dutchess	see Case 1
1810	Mary Grier in Kingston, Ulster	see Case 2
	Rev. Thomas Grier, Minisink, Orange	see Case 3
1820	James Grier in Fishkill, Dutchess	
	Thomas Grier in Minisink, Orange	see Case 3
	David Grier in Montgomery, Orange	
	James Grier in Walkill, Orange	see Case 4
1825	Joseph Greer , Montgomery, Orange	
	James Greer, Walkill, Orange	see Case 4
1830	John Grier in Montgomery, Orange	
	James Grier in Montgomery, Orange	
	John Grier in New Paltz, Ulster	
	James Grier in Walkill, Orange	see Case 4

The names in bold are those I believe are in my family group. The names I have not yet researched are John Grier found in Ulster County in 1830, and David Grier in Montgomery in 1820.

John & Jane Grier – Case 1

First, I would like to address the Jane Grier in Rhinebeck in 1800. The location is bit north of where I know my ancestors were, and the date is before I believe my relations arrived. But I must still consider that perhaps other related Greer families did arrive in America earlier, and my relations came to the Hudson Valley area later because they knew other family who already lived there.

Jane Grier was apparently married to a John Grier, 1743-1797. His will was probated 11 Apr 1797 and it identifies his wife as Jane, his children as Jane, John, George, and the children of Jane's previous marriage as Caty, Maria, Cornelia (birth surname was apparently something like Hoffman). But then I located some deed records from 1801 and 1803 where the sheriff was disposing of Grier land. In reading these records (to the best of my ability), here is my abstract of what happened. In 1787, John Grier and his merchant partners James Grier and David Brooks bought some property [apparently in Rhinebeck, Dutchess area] from Anthony Hoffman of Red Hook (same surname as children of Jane's first marriage). In 1791, there were several “rulings” which pertained to John &/or Jane Grier of Rhinebeck or Poughkeepsie, and which I have not yet located and read. But in 1803, the sheriff seized the Grier land and sold it at public auction to pay a debt of **8539 pounds** owed to (I think) to William

Rhodes and Samuel Hopkins where John, James, David, and Samuel Hay had all been convicted in **New York City** of not paying.

Here are additional details about the rest of this John Grier family:

- Jane, the wife of John, died 20 Sep 1809 and is buried with John Grier in Old Red Church Cemetery in Tivoli, NY.
- There was a George Greer and wife Elizabeth who had several children christened at the Pleasant Valley Presbyterian Church, where my family group are also known to have attended. I cannot account for who that George Greer was, but list him here as a possible son of John Grier who died in 1797. George and Elizabeth Greer had the following children christened in PV between 1808-1814: Hugh, James, Isabella. In addition, Mary Greer, also a daughter of George and Elizabeth, married Caleb Herring on 26 Jun 1814.

Mary Grier in Ulster – Case 2

I found reference to some Grier burials at the First Reformed Dutch Church Ground in Kingston:

Grier, Major James, May 9, 1803 50 yrs.

Grier, David Lawrence, s. of Major James and Mary, Sept. 27, 1820 23-10-12

It could be a fair guess to say that the Mary Grier found in the 1810 census is the widow of Major James. But who was Major James? I have found reference to Major Grier's company as being part of the Tenth Pennsylvania Regiment commanded by Col. Richard Humpton which served during the summer of 1780. Major James Grier was commissioned on March 1, 1778. So far, I've not been able to determine if the Major James who served in PA is the same who died in Kingston, but continued research on this case could still provide some interesting clues.

Rev. Thomas Grier – Case 3

I have not done much work on this case yet. He lived and worked mostly in the Minisink area, and I don't really know if he had family or not. I also don't know what religion he was associated with, but wonder if it was not the Presbyterian. He died 19 May 1834 and is buried at Mountain Avenue Cemetery in Cold Spring, Putnam, NY (his death record there says “previously of Orange County”).

James Grier of Walkill – Case 4

This person is different from my James Greer simply by virtue of them both being enumerated in different places in the 1820 census, my James Greer being found in Fishkill. But who was this James Grier? My feeling is that he could likely have been the James Greer referred to in the Portrait and Biographical Record of Orange County (Chapman Publishing), the father of Sylvanus Greer. This James Greer served in the War of 1812, became a blacksmith after moving to Walkill, married to Mary Martine, and had children some of whom included Sylvanus, Alpheus, Aceneath, and Susan. It looks like this James Greer died in 1866 at the age of 76.

Here is a related post found on the internet that gives a little more information:

David GREER (wife's name was possibly Frances) of Blooming Grove, Orange Co., NY was the father of James GREER 1791 -1866 (wife Mary MARTINE) of Town of Walkill, Orange Co., NY.

David was supposedly from New England, but there were other contemporary GREER families in Orange County that came from Ireland with the Clintons. David was probably born before 1770 and may also have had a daughter named Frances.¹

My feeling is that these Greer's are not related to my branch, but there is, nevertheless, one connection I have found. The daughter of Walkill James Grier, Aceneath, married John S. Ogden. The son of my James and Jane Greer, James who became a preacher, married Emily Ogden. At this point, I have not traced these two Ogden families, but ties could very well exist between them.

Greer's Who Appeared in MI But Not In NY

It's interesting to study the 1840 census of Southfield, Oakland, Michigan, which is where the Grier-Gillespie families settled. Here is a list of names found there at that time, all listed on the same sheet of the census:

Samuel Beattie, James Beattie, Joseph Greer, John Crawford, John Greer, George Slater, Charles Lemon, Elizabeth Gordon, Thomas Gillespie, James Greer, Thomas Greer, Robert Greer, and William Cummings. Other Orange County names I recognize on this sheet are Wilcox and Gilchrist. But for the most part, this group represents all the members of my Orange County family!

There are two Greer names on this sheet, however, that don't show up back in NY. First is Thomas Greer. There is a land patent for 80 acres to Thomas Greer of Orange County, NY dated 1832. He can be found on the 1850 census of the same area in Michigan, born about 1805 in Ireland with a wife named Catherine who was born in NY and five other children, all born in MI. I believe this Thomas Greer died 23 July 1858, intestate. A probate document in MI lists his heirs as: Augusta (assigned administrator), Courtland, William, Eliza, George, and other children. Interestingly, this land was right next to the land patent for Elizabeth Gillespie. Even though this family group also seems to hail from NY, it is my feeling, they were not there very long because I have not been able to find them on a census there.

Next is the name of Robert Greer. Originally I had assumed this Robert Greer was the adult son of James and Jane Greer, who was known in documentation as Robert M. Greer. But that was incorrect. This Robert Greer is listed in later MI census' as being from Scotland, his wife was Elizabeth Brelsford who was born in England, and their children, all born in MI included John F., Martha, Sarah, William, Francis (Fannie), and Hezekiah. In addition, Elizabeth's mother, Sarah Brelsford, lived with them until she died in 1857. Robert died in 1861 and Elizabeth died in 1877, and they are both buried at Pine Lake Cemetery in West Bloomfield, MI. Like the Thomas Greer family, this family group does seem to have associations with my family group simply by virtue of being in the same locale at the same time. But this group does not seem to have any ties back to NY, although I do find the tie to England interesting.

Greer's Who (Maybe) Stayed Behind in NY

There is one other family group that piques my interest, and that is the Robert Greer family found in Fishkill in the 1860-1900 census'. Robert was apparently born around 1810 in Ireland, he married somebody named Eliza born in Dutchess County, and they had two daughters, Sarah, born about 1837 in Orange County and Nancy born about 1840 in Dutchess County (the birth locations were determined from the 1875 NY State Census). It appears that Robert died before 1880, and his wife before 1900.

¹ from <http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/GREER/1996-12/0851763242>, accessed 8 Oct 2012.

The daughter Nancy became involved in running a hat shop.

Because of the Fishkill location, I can't help but think this Greer family is tied to my family group. Why? First there is the clue that Nancy Gillespie's first husband might have been named Robert (recall the 1812 christening record found in Pleasant Valley for a child of Robert and Nancy Grier). It's easy to think that if Robert and Nancy Grier had a son, they might have named him Robert, and if the son Robert (I'll call him Fishkill Robert) had a daughter, he might have named her Nancy. If Fishkill Robert Greer came to Dutchess county as a child and grew up there, and if he was in his 20's when the rest of the families were moving west, he perhaps made the choice, for whatever reason, to remain behind. But for this scenario to be true, it would mean that his mother, Nancy Gillespie, was living in Michigan until 1872. I have not been able to locate Nancy in the 1870 census nor any death or probate record – only her gravestone. With that said, the land that she did have in Michigan (through inheritance from her sister Elizabeth) she transferred to her daughter, Mary Greer Slater, who had also moved to Michigan. So far, I have not located any Michigan records that link Nancy Gillespie back to a son named Robert in Fishkill.

I freely admit that the Fishkill Robert Greer family group might have no connection whatsoever to my branch. Nevertheless this subject always grabs my attention, and I believe is worth including in this report.

Deed Records

Here's the thing. The Greer families who migrated to Michigan acquired lots and lots of land, hundreds of acres. My understanding of the patent process in Michigan is that people paid \$1.25 per acre in cash. So where did the Greer's get that money? I was expecting to find several large land sales back in New York, but those searches have yielded nothing. At all. Which stumps me. I've been told that people in New York were often renting from out-of-state landowners, but so far I've not been able to locate any New York records of rents received by landowners (there was something a bit like this at the NY State Archives, but nothing that was helpful for my purposes). In any case, here is a summary of my deed searches in the New York counties of interest.

Dutchess County

Grantee Records

1787	John & James Grier	10-353	already checked
1834	John Grier	52-245	<u>not yet checked, this one of interest!</u>

Grantor Records

1801	Jane Grier	16-537	already checked
1803	Jane Grier	18-15	already checked
	John Grier (shff)	18-266	already checked
	James Grier (shff)	18-269	already checked
1829	George Grier	43-??	not yet checked
1831	John Z. Grier	47?	not yet checked

Orange County

Grantee Records

1809 Thomas Grier ?? not yet checked

Grantor Records

???? Thomas Grier & wife ?? not yet checked

Ulster County

Grantee Records

1804 Mary Grier 17-214 not yet checked

Grantor Records

1829 Mary Grier 35-56 not yet checked

Church Records

As mentioned in my previous article, I believe the Grier's were Presbyterian, and through later marriages in NY and MI, they were associated with Covenanter families. The son of James and Jane Greer, James Greer Jr., attended the college of New Jersey in Princeton, and ordained as an evangelist by the Presbytery of North River in 1843.

The records found at the Pleasant Valley Presbyterian Church document the christening of three children of James and Jane Grier: James (1815), Joseph (1817), and Robert M. (1822). In addition, there was a christening record for a child named Jane in 1812, the parents were Robert and Nancy Grier.

I have puzzled, however, not finding more Presbyterian records that apply to the Grier's in other locales in Dutchess and Orange counties. But I learned something in talking to the town historian of Fishkill who is herself a member of the Reformed Church. She said that she was raised Presbyterian, but that people, then as now, sometimes move between Presbyterian and Reformed churches as the basic beliefs between the two are very similar. This then could explain finding the Grier name in the records of the Reformed Dutch Church of Beacon, NY:

- 1822, James Greer listed as a member
- 1828, Mary Greer listed as a member
- 5 Jul 1832, marriage of Robert S. Greer of New Cornwall, Orange, NY to Eliza Low, witness Joseph Wilson. This is very likely the Robert Greer who lived in Fishkill after the 1850s and who may or may not be connected to my family.
- 3 Oct 1879, death of Robert Greer, 74 years

Curiously there was a record from the West Taconic Methodist Circuit of the Rhinebeck district,² where Nancy and Sarah, children of Robert Greer and Eliza Low, were christened or confirmed. I have been told that Methodists and Presbyterians did not mix, but this might be testament to a different reality in the times.

² The Dutchess magazine published by DCGS, 24:56.

Gravestones

Because Pleasant Valley seems to have been the earliest place where I can locate the Grier's of my family branch and since they lived there long enough to have children, it's reasonable to think there were also some deaths. Having traveled myself to Pleasant Valley, I discovered much to my amazement, a volume of work compiled by a Girl Scout for a school project – a complete inventory of every cemetery in Pleasant Valley! This rather thick volume is amazing to behold. Unfortunately, there were a total of three Grier/Greer names to be found in that volume, all with death dates much too late to be of interest to me.

Beyond that, the gravestone research I've done has been primarily through the Findagrave website, which I love while reminding myself constantly that it can never ever be considered complete (just because a name is NOT found, does not mean it is not there, only that no posting has been made to the website). And oh yes, the content is updated constantly so maybe the name was not there yesterday, but might be today, a condition that can make modern research feel like an endless loop! With all that said, here is a summary of Grier/Greer names who died before 1900 in Dutchess and Orange counties found on the findagrave website as of October 9, 2012.

Dutchess County:

spelling GRIER, two results, John and Jane Grier previously mentioned.

spelling GREER, zero results.

Orange County:

- spelling GRIER, 5 results; one might deduce that the Slate Hill Cemetery is the only one containing Grier's (probably not).
- spelling GREER, 10 results, includes the Walkill James Greer couple, James and Mary Martine Greer

I can only conclude from this analysis that: a) not many people of the name Grier or Greer died (and we might also assume lived) in Dutchess or Orange counties before 1900, or b) many cemeteries in these two NY counties have not yet been cataloged on findagrave, and if they were we would find more families of this name, or c) even if all the cemeteries were diligently cataloged, there still might not be many families of this name, or d) many of the gravestones I saw in that region can no longer be read & so there no longer exists information to be recorded, and/or e) many people were simply buried without a headstone. Sigh.

Conclusion

These case studies have not really furthered my knowledge of Greer families who came to Michigan from Orange County, New York. The theory I had about them so far remains the same, and that is that James and Jane Grier, and possibly Nancy Gillespie and a Greer husband resided in Dutchess County in the 1812-1825 time frame before crossing the river where they resided shortly in Orange County around 1830, probably in Montgomery where a Joseph Greer was also found (and who also migrated to Michigan).

The only information that might be worth following up has to do with James Grier who was the partner of John Grier of Rhinebeck. Why? Because that John and James Grier were clearly involved in real

estate. In looking on genealogybank, there are many real estate ads from John and James Grier and David Brooks. We know some of what became of John Grier, but what of James? I'm not so sure that he is accounted for in these case studies, and so one has to wonder. If the Greer's showing up in Michigan acquired a lot of land, and continued to do that over time, perhaps the real estate interests of the Rhinebeck Grier's represent a clue? It's a thought.

As for a plan for where to go from here:

- I have considered widening the search for Grier families to include specifically New York City. But this idea does not change that the early records in Michigan clearly point to Orange County, New York.
- I would like to give more attention to immigration and naturalization records. To this point, I've not spent much time with such records because they don't seem to yield any more information than a name, and without a way to connect a name, the result is only still a guess. Nevertheless, maybe there is still something more substantial to find.

Please contact Mary Ann Schaefer at genealogist@gmail.com with comments or questions. My family tree with source documentation is available on ancestry.com and soon to be on rootsweb. Updated research information can be found at my website www.yesteryours.net/gillidx.html, which also provides a link to my research blog.