

**A Study of Gillespy
Religious/Church Associations
in Ulster County, New York
1750-1800**

By Mary Ann Schaefer
Boulder, CO
12 March 2020

Introduction

My research of the last six months has focused on Gillespie family groups of early Ulster and Orange counties, New York. As I begin to understand how these families lived during the Revolutionary times that resulted in the founding a new country, it becomes increasingly clear that the religious beliefs they brought with them were an important influence. This article explores both the religious affiliations of the Gillespy family groups I've been studying, as well as the churches they were associated with.

Note that the known religious practices of my Gillespie family group can be found in [Appendix A](#).

Religious Practice

The early Gillespie family groups of Ulster, NY appear to have attended churches of these denominations:

- Dutch Reformed
- Presbyterian and related offshoots

To give some context, here is my historical understanding of these religious groups.

The [Dutch Reformed Church](#) (DRC) was formed from the Protestant Reformation, and based its doctrines on Calvinism. This religion came with the Dutch migrants to America beginning with the settlement of New Amsterdam (today Manhattan, NY) in 1628. When the Scot-Irish Presbyterians migrated to America later, they often attended established DRCs because the theology being practiced was much the same. Some of the Presbyterian faith inter-married with the Dutch and continued to attend DRCs thereafter.

Now for the [complicated history of Presbyterianism](#) as it relates in particular to the Scot-Irish people. Here is my summary understanding of the evolution of this faith:

1. Church of Scotland, a Presbyterian tradition, broke away from Rome with Protestant Reformation around 1560, doctrines influenced by Calvinism.
2. 1638 The Scottish Parliament adopted the Covenant, which denounced the Pope and the doctrines of the Roman Catholic faith. All Scot citizens were required to sign an oath to the Covenant (God first, above all else). Subsequently **Covenanters** ran the government, and they sent armies to Ulster in Northern Ireland to protect Scottish settlers there from the Catholic rebels. The English under Oliver Cromwell defeated the Covenanters by 1652, and what followed were years of rebellion, then the Killing Times and Covenanter martyrs, of whom [James Renwick](#)¹ was the last (executed in 1688). Those Scottish Presbyterians still in Ulster, including Covenanters, began to migrate to North America around 1717 and their believers formed the **Reformed Presbytery** in 1743. Covenanters were mostly concentrated in eastern PA and SC, but small groups also existed in MA, NY, western PA, NC, and GA. They were vocal agitators for independence from Great Britain and many joined the revolutionary armies. However, once the U.S. Constitution was in place, it also did not mention Christ and the

¹ I single out this martyr because the name of Renwick was used as a given name in the NY Gillespie family group. Abraham Gillespie (son of Samuel) had a son named Renwick 1825-1904, and Henry P. Sloat and Mary Ann Gillespie had a son named James Renwick Sloat 1839-1922 (born and died in Michigan). I believe the name Renwick was probably in honor of the Covenanter martyr, James Renwick.

Covenants, and so strict Covenanters continued their political dissent by refusing to vote, hold government office, serve on juries, or swear any oath to the US.

It should also be noted that Covenanters opposed slavery and outlawed it among their members in 1800.

3. 1733 **Seceders** left the Church of Scotland over differences in doctrine and formed the **Associate Presbytery**. The monarch moved many of these followers to Ulster (N. Ire.) to quell rebellions between Catholics and Protestants, and a Seceder congregation was established in Armagh in 1785.² Many Seceders subsequently emigrated from Northern Ireland to America in the mid-1700s with Seceder ministers. They settled for the most part near the Covenanters in the American colonies (PA, NY, OH, VA, NC, SC, GA).

It should be noted that there was Second Secession movement in 1761, which included, interestingly, a minister named **Thomas Gillespie**. This became known as the Relief Church, which later evolved into the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

4. 1782 Nearly all American churches of the Covenanter and Seceder traditions met in Philadelphia and agreed to come together to form the **Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC)**, which still exists today. The northern synod of the ARPC merged with those remaining in the Associate Presbytery in 1858 to form the United Presbyterian Church of North America, which later merged with the Presbyterian Church in the United States to become what is today called the United Presbyterian Church in the United States (UPCUSA).

It can also be noted that the Presbyterians had praying circles and/or societies that were often held in people's homes and officiated by traveling ministers. Most notable was Rev. John Cuthbertson 1718-1791. Arriving to America in 1751, he was the first Reformed Presbyterian (Covenanter tradition) minister in the colonies.

Sources and Further Reading

Paterson, T. G. F. "Presbyterianism in Armagh." *Seanchas Ardmhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society* 19, no. 2 (2003): 140-63. Accessed March 7, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/25746925.

[Covenanters](#)

[Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America](#)

[Seceders](#)

[Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church](#)

[History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America](#); W. M. Glasgow; Baltimore; 1888.

[History of Orange County, New York](#) with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches, Ruttenber and Clark, Philadelphia, 1881, p. 132 and p. 422.

² Paterson, T. G. F. "Presbyterianism in Armagh." *Seanchas Ardmhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society* 19, no. 2 (2003): 140-63. Accessed March 7, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/25746925; p. 153.

My Notes Regarding History of Orange County (HOC):

1. I recommend accessing this source through Internet Archives (the link I have provided here). This HOC has, I believe, 820 pages. There are various links to this book on Google Books – one goes only up to p. 408, and another, a reprint issued by the Orange County Genealogical Society in 1986, which apparently has two volumes of which I can only locate the first, goes only to p. 430. I can't explain why the digital versions of HOC on Google Books are not complete, but the Internet Archive version seems to be complete, I think. Also note that this HOC is not indexed, though I have seen an index that was later separately published.
2. Now to my argument with this source. I believe the description of Associate and Associate Reformed Presbyterian Churches on page 132 is incorrect in these assertions:
 - “**Rev. John Cuthbertson, of the Associate Presbytery of Scotland...**” Cuthbertson was definitely a Covenanter, ie the Reformed Presbytery, which is confirmed in multiple other sources including publications about his diary. Cuthbertson may have ministered to Seceders in America, but he was a Covenanter, a denomination known as the Reformed Presbytery and not the Associate Presbytery.
 - “**... in 1753, Revs. Galletly and Arnot, representing the Associate Reformed, followed Cuthbertson.**” As stated earlier in this section, the Associate Reformed denomination was formed after the War of Independence, and is purely American. Galletly and Arnot were members of the Associate Presbytery of Scotland; not the Associate Reformed denomination which did not yet exist in 1753.

Both of these misstatements in the HOC are stated more correctly in the [Goodwill Memorial](#), p. 29. Because the basic misinformation on this subject in HOC wrapped me up in hours of confusion, I caution other researchers from wasting their time trying to validate what is written in that particular section of the HOC.

The Churches

Dutch Reformed

Ulster county DRCs were located in Kingston, Hurley, Rochester, Guilford (Gardiner), Kaatsbaan (Saugerties), Shawangunk, New Hurley, New Paltz, Walkill, Marbletown, and Wawarsing.

Presbyterian and Related

Here are the Presbyterian and related churches in/around the area where Gillespie's lived:

Presbyterian:

- [Goodwill](#), (Montgomery) established 1741 or before
- Hopewell, ~1779 (Crawford); among trustees were William Cross, Robt Milliken, Jonathan Crawford, Daniel Bull, others

Reformed (Covenanter tradition)

- Rev. John Cuthbertson, 1795 Reformed Presbyterian Church of Coldenham (today the Coldenham-Newburgh RP Church)

Associate (Seceder tradition)

- Neelytown formed some time in the years 1765-1769 from families who left the Goodwill Church, surnames included Eager, Beatty, Wilkin, Young, McCobb, Douglas, Bull, Morrison, William, Miller, Andrew Wilson*, Hall, Elliott, Crawford, Jackson, McBride, Booth, Wood, others. Robert Annan was minister 1767-1783, later became connected to the Associate Reformed Presbytery; in 1796 John McJimsey became minister (also served Graham's Church). This church moved in 1832 to Campbell Hall and changed the name to Associate Reformed Church of Hamptonburgh.
- Little Britain also ministered by Robert Annan; became Presbyterian in 1867.



Associate Reformed (combined traditions)

- Neelytown, previously Associate tradition, moved to Hamptonburgh – today the First Presbyterian Church of Hamptonburgh
- Little Britain, previously Associate tradition, became Presbyterian in 1867 – today the Encounter Church in Rock Tavern, NY.
- Graham's (Crawford) – today Grahams Presbyterian Church in Pine Bush (though the Grahams Church Cemetery is the location of the original church).
 - Rev. John McJimsey was pastor here and Neelytown

It should be noted that the following wills mentioned these churches or their ministers:

- Robert Graham, written 1799, gave his farm for use as a parsonage for the congregation of a church being built near William Sopus (?), those being of the Associate Reformed church being ministered by Rev. John McJimsey; also \$\$\$ toward finishing the church.
- Ann Wilkin Graham, written 1800, proved 1805; bequeath \$\$ to Rev. Robert Annan, the former minister of the Neelytown Congregation.

- William Gillespie, written 1813 in Newburgh, gave \$125 to Mrs. Ann McJimsey, wife to the Rev. John McJimsey, and the like sum to her son, William McJimsey. There is no stated relationship to these people in this bequest. My guess is that Ann McJimsey was likely related this way:
 - Wm. Gillespie was married to Mary Wilkin (sister of Ann Wilkin, wife of Robert Graham).
 - Mary Wilkin was the daughter of John Wilkin and Elizabeth Crawford.
 - Mary Wilkin had a brother, George Wilkin, ~1737-1778. Like Robert Gillespie,³ he was captured at Ft. Montgomery and later died on a prison ship in NYC.
 - George Wilkin had married Mary Bull; one of their children was Ann Wilkin, 1776-1852.
 - George Wilkin's daughter, Ann Wilkin, married the Rev. John McJimsey in 1797. Thus Ann McJimsey was William Gillespie's wife's niece.

Episcopal

I've not talked about the Episcopal Church, which derived from the Church of England. I include here mention of the St. Andrew's Church, whose congregants included James G. Graham and Justus Banks, neighbors of James Gillespie.⁴

Sullivan County

I want to briefly talk about the Presbyterian and related churches in/around Bethel⁵ and White Lake, locations that were in Ulster county until 1809 when that area became part of Sullivan county. These locations are of interest because of the following Gillespie connections:

- William Gillespie, 1778-1849, son of James Gillespie and Mary Brown, relocated to Bethel from NYC before 1820.
- Ann Gillespie, 1787-1853, daughter of Jane Neely and one of the Gillespie brothers (William Sr. 1737-1813 or Matthew 1740-1797),⁶ married William Brown and relocated to Bethel before 1810. After the deaths of their first spouses, Ann and William Gillespie married in 1842. I believe they were cousins once removed.
- When the Gillespie/Greer families migrated to Michigan in the 1830s, many settled in a township they called White Lake. In addition, many were part of the congregation of Southfield Reformed Presbyterian Church, organized 1838 by David Stewart, formerly of White Lake, New York.

Sullivan county churches of interest pertaining to Gillespie's"

- White Lake Reformed Presbyterian Church – first ministered by Rev. Thomas Greer,⁷ previously of Minisink. This congregation was organized twice, the first time from 1808-1833.

³ I believe Robert Gillespie and William Gillespie were brothers.

⁴ "[A Study of Gillespie Neighbors](#) In Shawangunk Precinct, Ulster County, New York, Pre-1800", MA Schaefer, Feb. 2020.

⁵ Also called New Shawangunk. HOC, p. 234.

⁶ [Introducing John Gillespie of Shawangunk, Ulster, NY Circa 1806-1880](#), MA Schaefer, October 2019; pgs 7-9.

⁷ I've not yet determined if this Thomas Greer was connected the Greer's who were associated with our early Gillespie's.

David Stewart was one of the ruling elders of this first organization, and it was noted that he removed to Birmingham, MI (see [Appendix A](#) for details about the Michigan churches). The second organization of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in White Lake occurred in 1848. I believe this church still stands and operates today.

- Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church of Mongaup Valley – organized in 1832, this is where William Gillespie was an elder. Members of this congregation shared the church building with the Reformed Church at White Lake until moving to Mongaup Valley in 1851. I don't believe this church exists today.
- White Lake Presbyterian Church – some Gillespie and Brown baptisms took place in this church in the 1830s.

Sources and Further Reading

The [Goodwill Memorial](#), or, The first one hundred and fifty years of the Goodwill Presbyterian Church : Montgomery, Orange Co., N.Y.; Dickson, James Milligan; Newburgh, NY; 1880.

[GOODWILL CHURCH!](#), Jay Campbell, 10 July 2018.

[Associate Reformed Church](#), Orange County, New York, by Dennis Partridge, newyorkgenealogy.org.

King, John Scott,. Sketch of the history of the Associate Reformed Congregation of Little Britain, N.Y. : (the Presbyterian church). Newburgh, N.Y.: Journal Co., printers, 1915.

[Old Little Britain Presbyterian Church](#), Facebook, New Windsor Town Historian – Official.

[History of Orange County, New York](#) with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches, Ruttenber and Clark, Philadelphia, 1881, pp. 420, 422, and 656. Refer also to the source note on pgs. 4-5 of this article.

History of Sullivan County, New York, [The Town of Bethel](#), James Eldridge, Quinlan; 1873;

[A Brief History of our Congregation](#), Southfield Reformed Presbyterian Church, Southfield, MI.

[Gazetteer and Business Directory of Sullivan County](#), N.Y. (1872) by Hamilton Child

[Glasgow's Record of the Elders of the Reformed Presbyterian Church](#), William M Glasgow, 1902; transcribed/indexed by Kathryn Medill, 2016.

Register of Marriages and Baptisms performed by Rev. John Cuthbertson 1751-1791, S. Helen Fields, Washington D.C. 1934, Reprint edition Heritage Books 2007

The People

This list is a work in progress.

Year	Who	Church/ Affiliations	Position	Source
1727	Hunters ⁸	Presbyterian		Goodwill 150 anniv. p. 13
1748	James Rainey ⁹	Covenanter	Founder of society in Walkill	
1765	Matthew Rea ¹⁰	Goodwill Church	Trustee	Goodwill 150 p 27
1766	John Glasbe ¹¹	Shawangunk DRC		Married & 2 ch baps
1775	Gilesby (Saml)			Mention in Cuthbertson diary; also Graham and Rainey
1783	Gilesby, Wm, Saml			Mention in Cuthbertson diary
Pre-1799	Robert Graham	Goodwill Church	Elder	1
1799	Robert Graham	Graham's Church/ Assoc. Reformed	Founder	1
1802	Samuel Gillespie	Graham's Church / Assoc. Reformed	Elder	1
1812	Abraham Gillespie	Graham's Church	Member	Bap of daughter
1822	Abraham Gillespie	1 st Presbyterian Church Hamptonburgh	member	Bap of daughter
1830	William Gillespie	White Lake (NY) Associate Reformed Church	Elder	2

Sources:

1. [History of Orange County, New York](#)
2. [History of Sullivan County, New York](#)

8 Some Gillespie's came with Hunters from Northern Ireland in 1727 according to some family histories; a subject of continuing research.

9 James Rainey was the father of Esther, who married Samuel Gillespie.

10 Matthew Rea married into the Hunter family, married Catherine, daughter of James Hunter I.

11 The marriage record clearly indicates that John was born in Walkill, which contradicts all the stories about him that he was born in Glasgow, Scotland.

Appendix A – Religious Practices of My Gillespie Family

To give some context, I will share what I know of my own Gillespie families:

Starting with the progenitor of my branch of Gillespie's, John Gillespie was born around 1760, probably in County Armagh, Northern Ireland. The name of his first wife is unknown, but John's marriage to his second wife, Jane Woods, was registered on 31 Dec. 1805 in the congregation of the First Armagh Presbyterian, then located at a church on Abbey Street in Armagh and ministered by Rev. Thomas Cuming.

The son of John Gillespie and Jane Woods, my ggg-grandfather, James Gillespie 1810-1899, married in Lisnadill (Church of Ireland) on 31 Dec. 1835, and emigrated to Quebec shortly thereafter. Once in Canada, the first census where we find James Gillespie (1861) lists his religion as Church of Scotland. After that, census records as well as a book¹² narrated by James' daughter, Mary Gillespie Henderson, indicate that James Gillespie was a Presbyterian who was very involved in [St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Quebec](#). Note that Mary Gillespie Henderson herself converted when she married a Methodist minister, James Henderson.

Of the Canadian Gillespie's who later migrated to Michigan, my ggg-grandmother, Elizabeth Donaldson Gillespie, was one of 29 members of the First Presbyterian Church of Springfield Township (MI), organized in 1858.¹³ Most of the Michigan Gillespie's after that became Methodists, and later generations helped establish the [Central Church of the Nazarene](#) in Flint, now celebrating its [100th anniversary](#).

But what of the children of John Gillespie's first marriage? Two of John's daughters (Jane and Nancy) married brothers of the name Greer (James and Robert). These couples married in Northern Ireland (presumably), and together with other Gillespie and Greer relations, migrated to New York shortly before the War of 1812. These families lived in the Orange/Dutchess county region of NY for at least two decades before they migrated to Michigan, actually pre-dating the Canadian relations' settlement there. Here's what I can say about the religious practices of my NY Gillespie branch:

- At least four baptisms took place for children of these Greer-Gillespie couples from 1812-1822 at the Presbyterian church in Pleasant Valley, Dutchess, New York.
- James Greer and Jane Gillespie had a son, James Greer born in Dutchess county, NY in 1815. James Jr. lived in Newburgh, NY before attending the Princeton Seminary. He was ordained as an evangelist by the Presbytery of North River in 1843, and his ministry work covered Michigan, Indiana, Virginia, Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri. He died in 1890 at the age of 75.

12 Memories of My Early Years, Mary Gillespie Henderson, Montreal, 1937.

13 History of Oakland County, Michigan, Durant, Samuel W., Philadelphia: L. H. Everts & co., 1877. Note that 13 of these members came from the First Presbyterian Church of White Lake.

- Of my NY Greer/Gillespie's who migrated to Michigan, most settled in in these townships:
 - Bloomfield
 - 1840 Census: Joseph Greer, John Greer, Charles Lemon, George Slater, Elizabeth Gordon (Gillespie), Thomas Gillespie, James, Thomas, Robert Greer
 - Southfield¹⁴
 - Southfield Reformed Presbyterian Church, organized 1838 by David Stewart, formerly of White Lake, Orange,¹⁵ New York.
 - David Stewart, first ruling elder
 - his grandson, John David Parks married Mary Greer, daughter of John Greer Sr. and Isabella Gillespie.
 - Alexander McClung, first ruling elder
 - his daughter, Ellen McClung, married Thomas Gillespie Jr.
 - James McKinney (not an elder – but buried at Southfield church)
 - his daughter, Lucy McKinney, married John Greer Jr., son of John Greer Sr. and Isabella Gillespie
 - William J McKinney, thought to be a son of James McKinney, married Sarah E. Gillespie, daughter of Thomas Gillespie Jr. and Ellen McClung
 - White Lake
 - Presbyterian congregation organized in 1835, the church built in 1840.
 - 1850 census: residence of Alexander McClung, Thomas Gillespie Jr.

As noted in my previous Gillespie research, many of the Gillespie's who showed up in territorial Michigan remained unplaced in my family tree.¹⁶ They were living among known relations and must have been related, but we don't know how. Moreover, how were these Michigan Gillespie's related to the Ulster/Orange, NY Gillespie's? Until recent and small DNA matches, any connections made have been circumstantial. All we have to point to is the 1833 Michigan land patent granted to Elizabeth Gillespie of Orange County, New York – who was definitely related to My Gillespie's.

Nevertheless, it still remains true that these Michigan Gillespie's and Greer's preferred to affiliate themselves with Covenanters. Did they migrate to Michigan because being a strict Covenanter was becoming harder and harder in the eastern United States after the War of Independence as many Reformed Presbyterians united with the Associate Presbyterians. These Gillespie-Greer's preferred the denomination of political dissent? I think now, as I thought when I started researching Gillespie's, that the religious ties might be significant to identifying these mystery Gillespie's. This round of research has only confirmed that idea.

14 [The Covenanter Church of Southfield and Its Early History](#), related by Mary E Thompson to Birmingham Eccentric, published February 1915.

15 I believe the reference to Orange county is a mistake in the Southfield history. White Lake, near Bethel, was part of Ulster county until 1809 when Sullivan county was formed.

16 [Gillespie Most Wanted](#), MA Schaefer, Gillespie Roots, 15 Jan 2012.