

Gillespie Religious Practices

In order to track down Gillespies in Ireland, it's important to know what religion they were practicing. So here are my research notes on that subject.

First, in looking at our original ancestor, John Gillespie. Edith's book says John was "instrumental in raising a company of volunteers for Lord Charlemount (Charlemont) in the Rebellion of 1796.

In summarizing here, I admit that I am piecing together major historical events in a cursory fashion. With that said, my understanding is this:

1. The Rebellion of 1796 was aborted. The French sent a force of 15,000 led by Wolfe Tone that made it to Ireland but never landed, had to turn around and go back because of stormy weather (and other factors). The same attempt and same result happened in 1798. Tone was an Irish patriot, and was eventually captured and convicted of treason. He committed suicide rather than be publicly hanged.

2. The actual Rebellion of 1798 had more to do with Ireland being freed from British rule (ideas influenced by the American and French revolutions).

3. Lord Charlemont commanded the Irish Volunteers, founded in 1778 and outlawed in 1793. It's hard to know if our John Gillespie was even old enough to be participating with this group (if he was born in 1780). In any case at one point the Irish Volunteers had 100,000 members. These militia were originally intended to defend Ireland from foreign invasion when British troops went to fight in American Revolutionary War. But there is some evidence that the Volunteers' loyalty to Britain eventually began to wane (they favored the French Revolution). Also interesting to note is that even though only Anglican Protestants were allowed to bear arms in Ireland, the Volunteers admitted Presbyterians and a limited number of Roman Catholics.

So this information seems to give more light to political rather than religious interests and I cannot from this conclude what religion John Gillespie was practicing. It does seem evident that he wanted to defend Ireland from foreign invasion, and possibly even from Britain.

Now to look at John's son James Gillespie. In Edith Gillespie's book "The Gillespie Family Record" it says that James Gillespie was employed on the estate of Lord Beresford "Primate of all Ireland".

If I am understanding everything correctly, Beresford was a bishop of the Church of Ireland, also called Anglican Church of Ireland, and while Protestant, is NOT Presbyterian (which I have been assuming the Gillespies were).

However, the following information is from "Frontiersmen and Settlers, The Bells in Scotland, Ireland and Canada" by William C Wonders:

"Although Presbyterian marriages by Presbyterian ministers were admitted to be legal in civil courts ... (it was) not until 1782 that the Irish Parliament passed a bill by which marriages of Dissenters celebrated by their ministers were legalized beyond doubt" (Falley, 705) However "before 1844 banns had to be published in the Established Church (The Church of Ireland) of the diocese in which the marriage was to be performed and clerygmen of the Established Church had to issue licenses: (so that)

a great proportion of marriages, regardless of the sect, were entered in the Parish Registers of the Established Church of Ireland." (Falley, 707)

Until 1844 Presbyterian marriages had no complete legal security and, where property rights might be involved, Presbyterians often took the precaution to be married and have their children baptized in the Church of Ireland. This latter practice probably stopped about the same time that Roman Catholics were emancipated, i.e., about 1830 - however, some Presbyterians never baptised their children in the Church of Ireland! (McCabe, John conversation with author 3 Oct 1996)

So hmmm. The fact that James was employed by Beresford does not mean he was Anglican. And he might have married and baptized his children under the Church of Ireland even though he was not in fact Anglican. This might have a lot to do with why Gillespies came to the new world - religious freedom.

Once in Canada, the first census where we find James (1861) he is listed as "Church of Scotland". After that, census records as well as Mary Gillespie Henderson's book indicate that he was Presbyterian, and was very involved in St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Quebec (services started in 1759, church erected in 1810, the oldest congregation of Scottish origin in Canada). Note that Mary Henderson herself converted to Methodist for her husband, and Gillespies who moved to Michigan mostly became Methodist (there were no Presbyterian congregations/churches in Michigan).