

**Connecting to
Early New York Gillespie's**

***Introducing
John Gillespy/Gillespie
Of Shawangunk, Ulster, NY
Circa 1806-1880***

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Introduction

I descend from a Gillespie family who lived in and emigrated from Armagh, Northern Ireland, and who is believed to have originated from Scotland before that. My direct ancestors are John Gillespie (~1760-unk) and his second wife, Sarah Woods. In 2010, we discovered new branches of the John Gillespie family who descend from his first marriage (wife unknown). Long before the children from the second marriage emigrated to Quebec in the 1830's-1840's, the children from the first marriage, specifically two Gillespie sisters who married Greer brothers, emigrated to Hudson Valley area of New York in the time just preceding the War of 1812. They lived in NY for two decades before migrating to Michigan where later some of the Quebec family joined them.

Now nearly a decade since that 2010 discovery, I periodically check for new records and DNA results hoping to find clues that will tie our Gillespie family history back to Scotland. That process also reminds me that there remain plenty of questions in New York. With so many Gillespie/Gillespie families in early Ulster/Orange county, NY, it hardly seems a coincidence that my Gillespie families also came through the very same area and even stayed for a couple of decades. Perhaps I simply haven't known the right questions to ask.

In answer to my unasked inklings, I found among my current Gillespie DNA matches an ancestry member, [sandrahawkinsheitt](#), with predicted relationship: 5th–8th Cousin, Shared DNA: 12 cM across 1 segment.

This match is admittedly minuscule and remote, but this member matches R.G. and M.T, and me. Of the Gillespie's shown in the matching member's family tree, she has a direct ancestor named Martha Jane Gillespie, 1832-1908, daughter of John Gillespie and Maria Klyne, wife of Andrew J Evans. These families lived in the Shawangunk¹ area of Ulster county, which is the general area of New York where our early Gillespie and Greer families lived.²

This new John Gillespie deserves some attention. He was born in Orange County around 1803, which means that his family was in America before our relations came around 1812. Who was he? This article is an exploration of that question.

A Word About Surname Spelling

There has been some documented comment that the family of Major John Gillespie purposely changed the spelling of his surname to “spy” to differentiate his family from those of “spie”. After this round of research, I find that almost all records in early New York record the surname as some variation of “spy”. Honestly, I don't begin to see the “spie” spelling until after 1810, which is when our branch of the family is thought to have come to New York.

With that said, the spelling variations are fairly irrelevant to the genealogy research. For the purposes of this article, however, I will use the “spy” spelling which indicates to me the early New York spelling.

1 Pronounced “SHON-gum” by most locals, the town's name is most likely a Dutch transliteration of the indigenous Munsee Lenape word meaning “in the smokey air”, a reference to the misty mountains.

2 Recall that when Elizabeth Gillespie acquired her land patent in Michigan in 1833, she was identified as being “of Orange County, New York.” Parts of Ulster county were ceded to Orange county in 1798, including those areas where many Gillespie families lived.

Reviewing Records

This new John Gillespy was born around 1803 in Orange County, information he reported in the 1850 census when he was living in Ulster county. In 1798, the southern-most towns of Ulster county were ceded to Orange county, which included, I believe, Pine Bush, Walden, Montgomery, Newburgh, and New Windsor. Walkill and north (including Gardiner where John Gillespy lived in his later years) belonged to Ulster county. Note that the town³ of Shawangunk included the village of Walkill.

We do find a baptism record for John Neely Gillespy, b 3 Jan 1806. The baptism was recorded at the Dutch Reformed Church in Montgomery, Orange, NY, and the parents were Matthew Gillespy and Mary Tiers. Indeed, most public family trees report that John was the son of Matthew Gillespy ~1770-1857. This Matthew Gillespy married first Maria Tiers, and they had four children: Jane, Esther, John, and James. Matthew then married Mary Borthick, and they had the following children: William, Samuel, Ann, Nelson, Matthew, Esther, Hiram, and Mary Lucinda. This Matthew Gillespy family, at least those with the second wife, removed to Simpson county, Kentucky which is where Matthew died.

So assuming that the new John Gillespy of Shawangunk was born before 1810, and that he was living in a Gillespy household, here are the Gillespy households in Orange County, NY and the number of males under 10 years old in 1810:

- **Josiah, Blooming Grove, 1.** I consider this household unlikely. Blooming Grove is not in a part of Orange County where other Gillespy's lived. In addition, this Josiah does not appear enumerated anywhere in Orange County either before or after 1810. But we still need to be careful. For all we know, Josiah died and his young son was adopted by William McElone in Shawangunk.
- **James, Goshen, 2** – he died in 1817 & his will named three sons, including one named John. James' widow, Mary, was enumerated in 1820 with three young males, thus we can presume that the son named John was with her at that time.
- **Samuel (jr), Montgomery, 2** – son of Saml & Esther, m Margaret Gunning, two sons at this time, Wm & Joseph
- **Samuel, Montgomery, 1** – presumed to be the older alive at this time, aka Samuel of Samuel & Esther. He had 4 males 16-25 in his household; likely his youngest sons and their families, which would have included Matthew, Abraham, & Joseph unmarried, and David just married, one male <10.
- **Stephen, Montgomery, 3** -- m to Jane Crawford at the time; I know of two males, born in this time, Jonathan C. and James M.
- **Joseph, Montgomery, 3.** Not sure about this one. Samuel Gillespy and Esther Rainey had a son named Joseph S., born abt 1785. But supposedly that Joseph did not marry until 1812 & he is accounted for in the Samuel hshld. In looking at my old case studies, this could be the son of John Gillespie of Montgomery 1746-1821. That Joseph married a Hannah Sears (date unk), and in this 1810 census this Joseph is enumerated next to Samuel Sears.
- **Polly, Newburgh, 3** – widow of John M who died earlier in 1810. She and her children are of definite interest.

³ My understanding of New York jurisdictions is that their term “town” seems to equate in my mind to a township, which is to say, in early New York, a town was a larger geographic division of a county, and it contained several villages.

- *Matthew, New Windsor, 2* – presumed to be the man married to Mary Tiers at the time with four young children: Jane, Esther, John, and James.
- *Robert, Walkill, 1* – wf Leah Crans, no son John (but one named Jonathan)

Based on this census review, of the nine possible Gillespy households where the new John Gillespy might have been residing in 1810, I narrow the possibilities down to Polly of Newburgh and Matthew of New Windsor. Try as I might, however, I still find no trace of Polly or her children after 1810 – just poof, they vanished! Meanwhile, the story of Matthew Gillespy seems to fit in that he had a son named John by his first wife, and by 1820 he was living in Kentucky with his second wife and no male child of John's age.

John Gillespy of Shawangunk married first Maria Klyne (varied spellings) in 1823,⁴ and it appears that this couple had four children: William M, Cornelius,⁵ and Mary Jane. I have speculated that the other male offspring of this couple might be David, but that connection is yet unconfirmed. John and Maria can be seen in the 1830 and 1840 censuses of Shawangunk. In 1848, John purchased property in Gardiner,⁶ and is subsequently seen in that village in the 1850 and 1860 census.

Maria Klyne Gillespy died in 1862, and shortly after that, John Gillespy remarried to a much younger woman, Julia A. Williams,⁷ and they had four more children: John W, Daniel C, Moses W, and Phebe H. In 1863, John and Julia sold the Gardiner property,⁸ but they continued to live there, at least through the 1870 census. By 1880, Julia was found in Montgomery as a widow. Thus far, I found no death, probate, or burial records for John Gillespy of Shawangunk.

William McElhone, a Foster Father

Was John Neely Gillespy, born to Matthew Gillespy and Maria Tiers, the same person as John Gillespy who married Maria Klyne and lived in Shawangunk? When trying to figure out the parents of an individual during this time frame, we can often look at the names that parents gave their own children. Naming patterns were frequently used which associated the parents' ancestry with the next generation, so knowing this might provide some clues.

In the case of this Shawangunk John Gillespy, he named his first-born son, William M. Gillespy. Even John's daughter, Martha Jane Evans, named one of her sons William. Thus, I launched into a rather long study of all the different William Gillespy's in the area at that time. In the end, I did not find any record that a William Gillespy had a son named John between 1800-1810.

Then I found the baptism record of William M. at the Dutch Reformed Church in Shawangunk which names him as “William Muckelhine.” That's interesting, but several subsequent searches of that middle name got me nowhere. Finally, I found another transcription of that record, which reads “William McElhone”. Still interesting, and this time, I found individuals of that very name who lived in Shawangunk for several decades.

4 [New York Marriages, 1686-1980.](#)

5 New York Births and Christenings, 1640-1962; familysearch.org.

6 Ulster County Deeds, 71-650.

7 [New York Marriages, 1686-1980.](#)

8 Ulster County Deeds, 125-318.

I was immediately hopeful that there was some obvious connection between McElhone and Gillespy. Maybe William had a first wife who was Gillespy? Or maybe a Gillespy mother or grandmother? My research is incomplete, but on the first pass, I don't see a family connection between McElhone and either Gillespy or Tiers families.

And yet William McElhone was somebody significant to John Gillespy for him to name his oldest son with that name. In fact, in looking at the 1820 census of William McElhone in Shawangunk, we see that he had a young male, 16-25, in his household, which does not fit anybody we know about in William McElhone's family. I submit that young male was John Gillespy.

But if John Gillespy was living with William McElhone in 1820, what happened to John's own parents?

- They died, or
- They divorced & each parent remarried, or
- They moved away, and John decided to stay behind. If we follow the theory that this John was indeed the son of Matthew Gillespy and Maria Tiers, that family story says that Matthew supposedly removed to Simpson county, Kentucky with his second wife, as well as several others from the Orange county region. Indeed, a Matthew Gillespy who fits this family group was enumerated in Franklin, Simpson, Kentucky in 1820. If Matthew was indeed the father of John, then John, for whatever reason, elected to remain behind in New York when Matthew left for Kentucky.

Smedes Connections, A Tiers Mother

The enumeration of John Gillespy's household in the 1850 census of Shawangunk provides a curiosity and potential clues that might help us figure out John's identity. One of the household members was:

Mary Smedes, age 70, born in Ulster county, insane

Who was Mary Smedes and why was she living with this new John Gillespy? The Smedes name is significant because of the connection to Major John Gillespy.⁹ Major John Gillespy married Magdalena Smedes, the sister of his business partner, Matthew Smedes. John and Magdalena married in 1766 at the Shawangunk Dutch Reformed Church. But in 1786, John and Magdalena sold their Shawangunk properties and moved to New Windsor. As far as I can tell, they did not leave any progeny behind in the Shawangunk area. So was the Major John Gillespy branch somehow connected to our new John Gillespy? Here is the trail of my research in trying to figure out if Mary Smedes, found in the 1850 Shawangunk household of John Gillespy, had some familial relationship to him:

- Some family trees have suggested that Magdalena Smedes had a sister named Maria. Besides finding no record of that, the reported age of the Mary Smedes in 1850 was 70 years old, so we are looking for a person born more around 1780.
- In the 1790 census, there were three Smedes in Shawangunk, Benjamin (Sr), Matthew, and Abraham. Thanks to the wills of all three men, we know some of female names in these families. The only name that might have been Mary was the daughter of Benjamin Smedes Jr. who died in 1780. In his will, he named a daughter Marytje, a name also mentioned in the will

⁹ See [Updated Case Studies of Gillespy/Gillespie Families](#) in Ulster/Orange/Dutchess, NY; MA Schaefer; April 2020.

of Benjamin Smedes Sr. who died around 1793. But that Marytje was supposedly born abt 1755 and later married an Albert Anthony.

- Feeling I had run out of candidates to identify Mary Smedes in John Gillespy's household, the obvious finally occurred to me. John Gillespy's mother, Maria Tiers, was probably also known as Mary. I knew that John's father, Matthew Gillespy 1775-1857 had two wives, first Maria Tiers and then Mary Borthick with whom he moved to Kentucky and had several more children. I suppose it was too easy to assume that Matthew's first wife, Maria Tiers, had died, but what if that assumption was a mistake? Perhaps Matthew and Maria divorced.
- Matthew Gillespy had moved to KY by 1820. If his first wife, Maria (Mary) Tiers, stayed in NY and remarried a Smedes in the Shawangunk area, who might she have married? In the 1830 census of Shawangunk, there were two Smedes households with females in the age group 50-59: Peter and Nathan. Of these two, I believe Peter Smedes was the son of Matthew B. Smedes and Catherina Trumpour, and by 1830, his father had died, so the census likely shows him living with his mother (the older female). Nathan Smedes was the son of Abraham Smedes and Catherine Dekker. There are two males and two females in the age group 50-59 in Nathan's household in 1830 Shawangunk. Nathan appears to have moved to New Windsor in 1840, and it could well have been him in Fishkill in 1850, living with what was probably a son of the name Levi Smedes. Beyond these census records, and a baptism record, little else is known about Nathan, or who he might have married, or who his descendants might have been.

So given this admittedly cursory research, here is a general summary of my understanding of the relevant Smedes families in Shawangunk:

Benjamin Peter Smedes 1725-1790¹⁰ + Rachel¹¹

- Matthew Smedes 1740-1810 (Major John Gillespy's business partner)
- Magdalena Smedes 1742-1825 (married Major John Gillespy)
- Abram Smedes ~1745-1804¹² + Catherine Decker
 - Nathan Smedes 1780-1856 + unk

I submit that Maria Tiers, first wife of Matthew Gillespy, married Nathan Smedes some time after Matthew Gillespy left for Kentucky, which was some time before 1820. Nathan was the only Smedes I have so far found who was of the right age and in the right place and whose marital life is not documented, meaning I find no records of marriages involving this Nathan Smedes nor baptisms of children that might have been his. Thus, we don't know if this speculation is correct, but if it was, I would guess Nathan's marriage to Maria was also his second one. And if Nathan Smedes and Maria Tiers Gillespy did marry, did they have any children of their own (perhaps Levi)? And finally, we can only speculate that if Maria developed senility, perhaps Nathan couldn't care for her and left her to the care of her son, John Gillespy of Shawangunk. So far, I have not found a death record for Mary Tiers Gillespy Smedes.¹³

10 Ulster County Wills, D-312, written 1790, names children, including Matthew, Abraham, and Magdalena, also children of deceased son, Benjamin.

11 Could be Rachel Decker or Rachel Jansen; documentation is not verified.

12 Ulster County Wills, D-206, written 1804, names children, including Nathan.

13 The 1850 Mortality Schedule shows a Mary Smedes, age 69, who died in Ulster County of consumption. I believe this person was Maria Decker, wife of Joseph Smedes, the latter having been another son of Abram Smedes.

Finally, this proposed scenario suggests that it was only coincidence that John Gillespy's mother, Maria Tiers, had a second marriage into another Shawangunk family, namely Smedes. The fact that Major John Gillespy had married into the same Smedes family 40 years previous does not necessarily mean that Major John Gillespy was related to Maria Tiers' first husband, Matthew Gillespy. That said, I still suspect that the two Gillespy family groups might have been related, but that is still a subject for more research.

Two Gillespy Brothers, One Grandfather

Now let's talk about the paternal lineage of John Gillespy of Shawangunk. It's complicated. It has involved yet another round of research in order to differentiate several Gillespy men of the same name in the same general area and time.¹⁴ For the purposes of this article, I am going to give only a high-level summary of my findings on the subject of John Gillespy's paternal ancestry.

Working backward from our new John Gillespy of Shawangunk, I believe his lineage looks like this:

- John's father was Matthew Gillespy 1775-1857 and his mother was Maria Tiers. Both his parents had second marriages.
- John's paternal grandparents were, by all accounts I've seen, Matthew Gillespie 1742-1797 and Jane Neely 1742-1788.
- John's paternal great-grandfather was supposedly Samuel Gillespie who purportedly arrived in NY as a youngster from County Armagh with Robert Hunter in 1727. The documentation of this account is completely lacking, and is still a subject of ongoing research.

So let's stick with the documentation we do have, that which pertains to John Gillespy's paternal grandparents. Here are the records which I believe can be attributed to Matthew Gillespy 1742-1797:

- 1769 Marriage record at Goodwill Church to Jane Neely
- 1790 Census of New Windsor
- 1797 NYC probate record showing wife Catherine as executor

This documentation gives some credence to the story that Matthew Gillespy married first Jane Neely, and second Catherine Thompson. I find no baptism records of Matthew's children, all born around the time of the Revolution. This Matthew Gillespy also did not leave a will, but some of his children were named in the wills of two of his Gillespy brothers:

- William Gillespy – 1737-1813, Newburgh, wife Mary¹⁵ – did not mention any children in his will, but did mention children of brothers Samuel and Matthew, deceased.
- Samuel Gillespy – 1731-1815 + Esther Rainey, Montgomery – his will named most children and a niece, Mary Dales.

So this gives us a good picture of John's grandfather, Matthew Gillespy, as well as his brothers' families. It appears that John Gillespy of Shawangunk was definitely related to Samuel Gillespie and Esther Rainey, the couple about whom we have wondered for so long (ie, Are we related to them??).

14 See [Updated Case Studies of Gillespy/Gillespie Families](#) in Ulster/Orange/Dutchess, NY; MA Schaefer; April 2020.

15 Mary's maiden name has been confirmed as Wilkin.

But then subsequent research into the Neely name (surname of Matthew Gillespy's first wife), lead me to a startling discovery. A law suit, *Jackson, ex dem. Gillespy & others v Woolsey, Supreme Court of New York, 1814*, involved the land of Jane Neely's father, James Neely Sr.^{16 17} In these proceedings, we learn many details, but the genealogical discovery seems to be this:

- Jane Neely, daughter of James Neely Sr, was married first to Matthew Gillespy, and had one daughter, Barbara.
- Jane Neely was married second to Matthew's brother, William, and had six more children: John, James, Matthew, Jane, Ann, and Mary.
- Jane Neely Gillespy died in 1788, and her husband William became guardian of their children.
- Matthew Gillespy died in 1797, attested to by his widow, Catherine.

However, aside from the sources listed here, I have not found any corroborative evidence that Jane Neely ever married William Gillespy. Furthermore, the will of William Gillespie named no children, but he did name several children of his deceased brother, Matthew. Until we can locate any other court records pertaining to this case to clarify how the Gillespy brothers related to Jane's children, I contend that the report of this NY Supreme Court case mixed up the name of the Gillespy brothers and misstated their relationship to Jane Gillespy's children.¹⁸ Long story short, and until proven otherwise: John Gillespy of Shawangunk was the son of Matthew Gillespy and Maria Tiers, and the grandson of Matthew Gillespy and Jane Neely.

More Tiers Ties

While we're on the subject of the Gillespy-Neely children, let's summarize what we think we know about them after this latest round of research:

1. John. As mentioned, I am proposing that this was the John R. Gillespy who died in Newburgh in 1810, leaving a widow named Polly and four children. Newburgh just happens to be where William Gillespy was living in his later years. Further, John was not mentioned in the wills of William or Samuel Gillespy, probably because he predeceased them. But whatever happened to John's wife and children?
2. James. I am proposing this was the James Gillespie who married Mary Moffat and died in Goshen in 1817. Not only does his birth year fit into the family group, but he was enumerated near other Tiers relations in 1810; see below. Furthermore, this James is the one who got stuck with the [Drowned Lands](#), which I previously wrote about in my research blog.
3. Matthew. This was John's father, married first to Maria Tiers, second to Mary Borthick, moved to Kentucky.
4. Jane. She was mentioned in William Gillespy's will as Jane Tears, and she was probably enumerated in the 1790 census of William Gillespy in Shawangunk. One Tiers genealogy tells us that Jacob Tiers, brother of Maria Tiers, married Jane Gillespy in 1808.¹⁹ It should be noted,

¹⁶ [The Neelys of Neelytown, New York](#) by R. Eden Martin, Chicago, 2016; pp. 77-81.

¹⁷ [Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of Judicature...in the State of New York](#), Volume 11, pp 446-457.

¹⁸ [The Question of Two Gillespy Brothers Reported in a NY Supreme Court Case 1814](#); MA Schaefer; April 2020.

¹⁹ [Ancestors of Lawrence Edgar Thiers](#), author unknown.

however, that the marriage record of the same date found at the First Presbyterian Church in Goshen was between Jacob Tiers and Jane Graham.²⁰ We might thus infer that Jane had a first marriage, but so far I find no record. It seems clear from censuses, however, that Jacob and Jane had children.

5. Ann. She was also mentioned in William Gillespy's will as Ann, wife of William Brown. She removed to Sullivan County, and after her husband died, Ann later married a cousin, William Gillespie 1778-1849.
6. Mary. I believe this is the Mary Dales mentioned in the will of Samuel Gillespy, though curiously not in William's. At this point, I don't know anything more about her.

It's worth noting in the 1810 census of Goshen that Jacob Tiers, James Gillespy, and Daniel Milspaugh were all enumerated together. It so happened that Daniel Millspaugh married Rachel Tiers, a sister of Jacob Tiers and Maria Tiers. Where did the Millspaugh's eldest daughter end up? Simpson county, Kentucky. Even better, that daughter married into the Borthick family. Wow, so All in the Family!

Conclusion

It's exciting to think that we have finally found some connection between my Michigan Gillespie family and the Samuel Gillespy families of pre-Revolutionary New York. It means that Michigan Gillespie's are remotely related to all those early New York Gillespy's. The evidence of that connection, however, still only stems from a fairly trivial DNA match. All of this learning about the family group of John Gillespy of Shawangunk still provides no documented tie to the Gillespie's who migrated to Michigan in the 1830s. But, I feel we're getting closer. The better we understand each Gillespy family group, the more likely it is that more connections will surface. Closer and closer.

And while I was nearly certain at the outset of this research that John Gillespy of Shawangunk must also have ties to Major John Gillespy of Saugerties, that idea could not be supported, at least not at this time. But there is still, in my mind, a real possibility that these Gillespy family groups were in some way related. After all, Ensign Samuel Gillespy served under the command of Captain John Gillespy in the Revolution. Methinks it was not mere coincidence that these two Gillespy men served together. More research is in progress, and in the meantime, we can watch for any more remote DNA matches between our Michigan Gillespie's and any Gillespy family groups tracing back to early Ulster/Orange counties in New York.

²⁰ New York Marriages, 1686-1980; familysearch.org.