

Exploring NY Gillespie Connections

March 12, 2011

One of the discoveries from the visit to the FHL this year was the marriage record for Henry P. Sloat to Mary Ann Gillespie in Oakland County, Michigan on September 18, 1838. This discovery prompted some investigation, the results of which are described here.

Who are the Sloats?

There are several documented family trees that identify Henry Polhemus Sloat as the son of James Sloat and Phebe Upright of Montgomery, Orange, NY. His grandparents are Cornelius Sloat and Ellinor McKinney¹ of Pine Bush, Orange, NY, and Cornelius was majorly involved in the Revolutionary War. Pine Bush is a location of particular interest because there is actually a Gillespie Family Cemetery there – with 2 people in it: Samuel Gillespie (1743-1815) and his wife, Esther Rainey² Gillespie (1751-1827). Other sources say these two are buried at the Graham Presbyterian Church in Pine Bush, Orange, NY. Either way, they lived and died in Pine Bush. This from wikipedia regarding Pine Bush:

The community was one of the four early nineteenth century settlements in the town. It has previously been known as "Shawangunk," "Crawford," and "Bloomfield." Currently, there is another community called "Crawford," located to the northwest in bordering Ulster County.

But first let me finish with the Sloats before getting too far with Gillespies.

According to the Sloat genealogies I have found, Henry and Mary Ann Sloat had 3 children in Michigan:

James Renwick Sloat (b 1839, MI)
Ellen Phebe “Nellie” Sloat Gardner (b. 1843, d 1915 Wayne, MI)
Polhemus Sloat (b 1847)

This family group can last be seen in 1870 census of Bloomfield, Oakland, MI. So far I have not been able to determine the death dates of either Henry or Mary Ann. Their son James, lived in Genesee county, and death records can be found for him and his family there. The death certificate for Nellie indicates her father Henry was born in NY and her mother, Mary Ann Gillespie, was born in Ireland.

And as long as we are talking about Sloat's, I almost hate to complicate this picture even more, BUT there was another Cornelius Sloat, b. 1778 in Ulster county, NY, son of Jonas Sloat who was a brother of Cornelius Sloat who married Ellinor McKinney – this SECOND Cornelius Sloat married Sarah Gillespie (b abt 1790 in Orange Co., NY) in 1810. They had one daughter, Elizabeth Sloat, b. 1811. For the sake of sanity, I am not going to mention this particular fact again in this particular report.

1 The name McKinney is significant because James and Martha McKinney had one son William McKinney who married Sarah Gillespie, daughter of Thomas Gillespie, and one daughter Lucy McKinney who married John Greer.
2 The name Rainey is significant because Samuel Greer married Mary J. Rainey in Southfield, MI in 1870, and because Agnes Rainey was one of the witnesses to the marriage of James H. Gillespie and Belle Greer.

Gillespie Connections?

The most significant detail (to my mind) about the first son of Henry and Mary Ann Sloat, James Renwick Sloat, is his middle name: Renwick. This, I think might be a link back to the Gillespie family in NY. Renwick Gillespie, born in 1825, lived in Montgomery, Orange, NY.³ His parents were Abram Gillespie and Mary Crawford, and his grandparents were Samuel Gillespie and Esther Rainey, Samuel having been a captain in the Revolutionary War. Depending on the whose tree you're looking at, Samuel was born in either County Armagh, Ireland or Ulster County, NY in 1742. It should be noted that Samuel appears to have had a brother named James about which nothing else is known at this point. Finally, Renwick's great-grandfather was either Samuel Gillespie Sr. or David Gillespie, and David was supposedly born in Scotland.

Renwick is such an unusual name that I can't help but think that Mary Ann Gillespie Sloat named her son for a Gillespie. But what is the relationship? From the 1860 and 1870 census' in Michigan, it appears that Mary Ann was born between 1815 and 1819 in Ireland or NY. She was enumerated as Mary A. in the '60 census and Ann in the '70 census.

Abram and Mary (Crawford) Gillespie had a daughter named Mary Jane born in 1815, but supposedly Mary Jane married somebody named McVene. I have looked at the children of all Abram's siblings, and I have not found one named Mary Ann. If Mary Ann Gillespie Sloat is tied to THIS Gillespie family, the connection is still not evident. In addition, I have studied every sibling and every descendant in this line, hoping to see names like Elizabeth, Nancy, Jane, Thomas, James, Robert, and yes, JOHN. For the most part – these names are absent and the names that are there, seem foreign to our Gillespies – names like Cyrenius. It feels like these Gillespie's MUST be related to us, but there is one important point to consider for the contrary:

Where are the Greer's in Pine Bush, Orange, NY? Pine Bush is a significant settlement for many Scot-Irish families and yet so far I find no Greer's. After all, we need to keep in mind that we are looking for the children of John Gillespie's first marriage, specifically two Gillespie sisters married to two Greer brothers. James Greer and Jane Gillespie may well be one of those couples, but did this couple ever live in Pine Bush? And who is the other Greer-Gillespie couple? And who are all the other Gillespie pioneers who left Ireland to spend the last days of their lives in Michigan – most notably, James, Thomas, and Elizabeth? They were half-siblings of our branch, and that's about all we know at this point.

Very little of this story belonging to the Pine Bush Gillespie's seems to fit. Most especially, I don't think our Greer's and Gillespie's were in America before the Revolution. Just based on the birth dates of the children of James and Jane Greer – their oldest son John Greer was born in Ireland in 1806. The next child, Mary Greer, was born in 1812 in New York. In my mind – the Greer/Gillespie's must have arrived in America in the early 1800 time frame. Now maybe there were other Gillespie relations in America already, but I just have a feeling that OUR first children did not come until later.

3 From Portrait and biographical record of Orange County, New York : containing portraits and biographical sketches of prominent and representative citizens of the county : together with biographies and portraits of all the presidents of the United States, published 1895, see page 263 for bio of Renwick Gillespie.

With that said, here are a few points which do suggest ties between the Pine Bush Gillespie story and what we are piecing together of our First Children:

* If you look at a map where Greer's settled in Michigan, you can see the acreage of H.P. Sloat near by.

* As noted, the surnames underlined above do have Greer connections:

a) Rainey

b) McKinney

* In 1855, Mary Slater (whose first husband I believe was a Greer), petitioned to have her step-father Thomas Gillespie declared incompetent because of his failing mental ability to manage his property or his affairs. Aside from the many other interesting details of that document, in the end, the probate judge did declare Thomas Gillespie incompetent and assigned **HENRY P. SLOAT** as a suitable and proper guardian!

Oh my. I might find myself inferring that Mary Ann Gillespie was a sister of Thomas, but the probate document also says specifically that:

“said Gillespie has no children or grandchildren living and only nephew and niece⁴ as heirs except his wife”

So according to this document at least, Mary Ann Gillespie Sloat was not a sister to Thomas Gillespie, but surely there must have been some relationship other than they were neighbors in Michigan?

Mary Ann and/or Ellen?

There are without doubt lots of enticing clues here, but so far, the question I started here with does remain, who was Mary Ann Gillespie? Or was her name Ellen? Here is an excerpt from some Sloat genealogy found at: <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~desloat/SHC/BFSfam.pdf>

Henry ⁴¹³⁶ [**Henry Polhemus** ¹¹¹⁹ b. 13 Feb 1816 d. 25 Oct 1880
w. 18 Sep 1838]

w. **Ellen Gillespie** ⁴¹³⁷ [**Mary Ann Gillespie** ²⁶⁰⁶ b. 26 May 1818]

Or were there two marriages, first to Ellen and then Mary Ann? And isn't it interesting that Henry and Mary Ann's daughter is named Ellen? Maybe she is named for her grandmother Eleanor McKinney? Well, I have written to the author of this genealogy asking for any clarification.

So as of this time, the case of Mary Ann Gillespie remains an open investigation!

4 Also in this particular probate document is noted that **Thomas Gillespie, Jr.** and **John Greer** showed up as interested parties in the estate. Thomas Gillespie, Jr (not a son of Thomas Gillespie, Sr.), b. 1816 in NY, died 1899 in MI, was married to Ellen McClung, and they had one daughter, Sarah Gillespie who married William McKinney. The death certificate of Thomas Gillespie, Jr. lists **James Gillespie** as his father, and mother unknown. If Thomas Jr. was Thomas Sr.'s nephew (which is only speculation at this point), then Thomas Gillespie Sr. and James Gillespie were brothers.

The other interested party, John Greer, was the son of James Greer and Jane Gillespie, and he married Isabella E. Gillespie. At this point in time, we do not know who Isabella's parents were, but my speculation has been that she is also the daughter of James Gillespie and the sister of Thomas Gillespie, Jr., and thus the niece of Thomas Gillespie, Sr. There is, however, no documentation to support this current theory.

Finally there is further question in my mind about who the “nephew and niece” (singular) might be because we have established that Thomas Gillespie, Sr. was the brother of Jane Gillespie Greer. And in 1855, several of Jane's children, all nephews and nieces to Thomas Sr., were alive. Would they not have been considered heirs as well?