

Finding a New Branch in the Gillespie Tree

Introduction

Anybody who is a descendant of Robert Gillespie most likely knows about Aunt Edith. She “wrote the book” when it comes to our family history. Long before computers and just about when typewriters were starting to become generally available, Edith Gillespie was working on recording her family history. Not only did she publish two rather remarkable volumes, one representing her father William Alex Gillespie's family history (The Gillespie Family Record, last published in 1966), and one representing her mother Abi Dodder Gillespie's family history (The Dodder Family Record, published in 1971), but she also created a family museum in her back yard, organized annual family reunions, and published years of newsletters called The WAG which she mailed far and wide with updates about all of us many descendants. She was, among so many things, a dedicated family historian.

The other relation who left us an extraordinary gift of personal and historical perspective was Mary Gillespie Henderson in her wonderful little book “Memories of My Early Years” published in Montreal in 1937. Containing more than names and dates, this book also gives some precious details about early Gillespie life in Canada from Quebec to Toronto. Together with Edith's Family Record, these two sources become more and more valuable as the future so quickly washes into the present.

Now in our own quickly passing years, we look upon the snapshots that Mary and Edith worked to preserve and marvel at the heritage that they left us to study and learn from. What follows now are some stories that have arisen from focusing some attention beyond all the names and dates and into the crystal ball of the times that shaped the people and places that we embody now. Inasmuch as these more recent findings can be considered updates to the work our relations left us, they are, in perhaps some small way, also a tribute to their faith in all of us to learn about who we are and who we can be because of where we have come from.

Progenitor of the Michigan Gillespie Clan

According to The Gillespie Family Record (hereafter called simply The Family Record) published by Edith Gillespie in 1966, **Robert Gillespie** was the oldest son of John Gillespie and John's second wife Sarah Woods. Even though we have not found actual records to support the given facts, Robert's vital information was nevertheless recorded in The Family Record as:

- born about 1806 in Ireland
- married Elizabeth Donaldson about 1828 in Ireland (this fact was obtained from familysearch.org)
- emigrated to Quebec, Canada about 1838 with his daughter Mary Jane where he worked to earn passage for the rest of his family to join him in Quebec (exactly when they came is not certain).

In the brief story of Robert's life, we are told simply that at some point he moved from Canada to Michigan where he and his wife Elizabeth raised their six children: Mary Jane, Alexander, Sarah, Elizabeth, Harriet, and James. The family can be found on both the 1860 and 1870 U. S. Federal Census of Springfield, Michigan. Robert died on 24 Mar 1871 in Davisburg, Michigan. His wife, Elizabeth, lived over 20 years more, dying in 1895. Both Robert and Elizabeth are buried at Andersonville Cemetery where their gravestone can still be found.

The Youngest Son

The Family Record gives a summary description of what became of each of Robert's children, which I will not repeat here. Anybody related to Edith Gillespie knows the most detail about Robert's oldest son, Alexander, because Edith as well as so many of us are all descended from Alexander and his Canadian cousin Sarah Gillespie with whom Alexander built a life in Genesee County, Michigan where 12 children and much of our long history came into the world. That part of the story could fill many pages, and still might one of these days as more and more cousins come online wishing to know about and share their part of the family history.

But my curiosity has been not only for the direct line from which I descend. I am drawn to the big picture to which each person's life is like a necessary puzzle piece. I want to know about every family member - men, women, and children - and what exactly happened to each of them in their lives.

And so following this train of curiosity as I went down the list of our Robert's children, I found that much could be said about each of the first five: Mary Jane (Beesley), Alexander already mentioned (also a noted Civil War veteran), Sarah (Husted), Elizabeth (Winslow), and Harriet (Parker). There are many interesting details that can be added to each of these lines, but wait! What happened to the youngest son, James? The Family Record says merely that James married Belle Greer, they moved to Denver, Colorado, and there is no record of any descendants.

Well, I am now a Colorado resident for over 20 years, so how can I not be curious about this James? And to say there is no record, well, I've discovered that sparks my curiosity even more. So let me tell you about what I have been learning.

First, James H. Gillespie¹ also served in the Civil War, and in the same company as his older brother Alexander: Company I of the Third Michigan Cavalry. James enlisted as soon as he became 18, and was just joining the company in Arkansas in 1864 as his brother was being discharged. James served until the end of the war in 1866 when the company was disbanded in San Antonio, Texas.

Second, after James returned to Michigan, he married Isabelle "Belle" Greer in 1873, and their son John Wilber was born in 1874. The family is enumerated in the 1880 Federal Census of Waterford, Michigan (in Oakland County). In 1890, the family was found in Guthrie, Oklahoma and how or why they were in Oklahoma is still not clear. But by 1897, they were in Leadville, Colorado, and probably by 1900 they were in Denver. John started his academic studies in Denver, but appears to have finished them at the University of Michigan. He then returned to Denver where his name is listed in the Bench and Bar of Colorado published in 1917. His occupation is thereafter found to be either "lawyer" or "attorney."

Belle died in 1918 at the age of 73 of heart problems. Her son John died shortly thereafter in 1920 apparently of a brain tumor. Before he died, John was enumerated in the 1920 census with his father James in San Diego, and I can only guess that they went to California seeking medical treatment for John's condition. James, who appears to have been employed by the City of Denver, lived another 11 years. He died in 1931 at the age of 85. All of his other siblings had died long before: Harriet in 1907, Mary Jane in 1914, Alexander in 1914, Sarah in 1916, Elizabeth in 1917, followed then by his wife in 1918 and his son in 1920.

In August 2009, Ethel Cole Berry accompanied me to Fairmount Cemetery in Denver where we were able to locate the gravestones of the James Gillespie family. It's hard to know, but we might well have been the first Gillespie relatives to visit the final resting place of James H. Gillespie and his family, to pay our respects for their lives, and to leave flowers in honor of their memory.

¹ The Family Record records James middle initial as "K" but in other documents found as well as on James' gravestone, the middle initial is "H". One can only wonder what his middle name might have been.

And so that was, I thought, the end of this story. Of course there were several missing details to wonder about like why did James take his family to Oklahoma? How did they get to Leadville, and then to Denver? What did James do for a living? How did John decide to practice law? What cases did he involve himself with? How long did John suffer his illness? Did James really die all alone in Denver with no family around? These are all wondering questions, but still I thought I had the big picture, or at least a bigger picture of what had become of Robert's youngest son, James. Little did I realize that my curiosity was about to take me one step closer to a much, much bigger question.

Introducing Isabelle Gillespie

Even though I was sure there was nothing new to learn, I went about ordering the death certificates for my Gillespie relations from the State of Colorado – you know, just for the experience of it. I remember filling out the applications (one for each relative), waiting in long lines with people who needed documentation having much more to do with present life, paying money, going away, coming back again, waiting more, and finally being handed an envelope with three official-looking certificates:

- John Wilber: his father is listed as James H. Gillespie, mother Isabelle Greer. Check.
- James H: his father and mother: Unknown. Well, ok, I suppose that seems reasonable since James had no family left in Colorado when he died. His birth place is listed as “Michigan?” so somebody knew that much about him.
- Isabelle: her father is listed as John Gaus, birth place New York; mother as **I. Gillespie**, birth place New York.

What?

I remember standing in the parking lot staring at Isabelle's certificate thinking that it must surely be some kind of mistake. I had already done some research on Belle's family. Her parents were John and Isabelle Greer, a couple who spent much of their lives in Southfield, Michigan raising, unbelievably, 16 children. So Belle's father being listed on the death certificate as “John Gaus” seemed like an understandable misprint; surely it was meant to say John Greer. But what to make of the mother being listed as “I. Gillespie”? That was just too strange! As I got back in my car to drive back to Boulder, I was busy dismissing the whole thing in my mind. There are countless families with the Gillespie name in the world who are NOT related to the Robert Gillespie line, or even the John Gillespie line for that matter. So it must simply be a strange coincidence that an unrelated Gillespie should have a daughter who married into MY Gillespie line. What a coincidence. I made the actual mental decision then to forget about it.

Realizing the Possibilities of Greer Connections

How then to explain synchronicity when it comes to doing this research? Several weeks after filing away the death certificates of my Denver relations, I was working away on some other aspect of the family tree, and found myself reaching for The Family Record to look something up having to do with the first James Gillespie. Skimming the information on page 57, my eye stopped suddenly on the following sentence:

"By his first marriage John Gillespie had two daughters and a son. The two daughters married brothers of the name Greer and emigrated to the United States, the son remaining in Ireland."

I could hear my heart pounding in my ears. Gillespie daughters married Greers and came to the U.S.

In the beginning of this inquiry, the fact that James Gillespie married a Greer had no particular significance other than noticing that James married into another Irish family. But then to find on Belle's death certificate that her mother was a Gillespie suggested some more continuous connection between Gillespie and Greer families. And now here, in Edith's own words sitting in plain sight all this time is the rather specific statement that Gillespies did marry Greers even before coming to the new world! I almost felt the universe pounding on my desk: Do you see? This is NOT a coincidence!

Collaborating Cousins

One of the more pleasant surprises to doing genealogy is discovering living relations. In 2009, I met a number of cousins through online communication avenues, including Diane Stanislaw, the daughter of another noted Gillespie genealogist, Thomas Gillespie. Diane and I had exchanged a few emails throughout the year, and then quite suddenly in the fall, within a month of each other we both lost our fathers. So among the other connections Diane and I had to the past, we also found ourselves related by sharing a deep ache at the present loss of a dearest loved one.

So maybe it was because we were both feeling that the holidays were somehow more lonely that we both found ourselves online more in the winter and exchanging frequent emails about family history. I had been able to order a copy of the last will and testament of James Gillespie, which I sent to Diane. In summary, James H. Gillespie left money or property to the following people in his will:

- Gertrude Isabelle Beach, Pontiac, MI (daughter of Addie Greer McHenry, Belle's sister)
- Edith McHenry, Pontiac, MI (daughter of Addie Greer McHenry, Belle's sister)
- Ida Greer Hudson, Lansing, MI (daughter of Edwin Greer, Belle's brother)
- Bessie Wilkins, Chicago, IL (note that Miss Jennie Wilkins was a witness to the marriage of James and Belle – Jennie is thought to be Belle's sister Eliza Jane Greer, who probably went by the name Jennie. Jennie married William Wilkins and they lived in Illinois and had a daughter named Bessie.)
- Florence R Stubbs, Denver, CO (relationship unknown)
- Clinton R Smith, Denver, CO (relationship unknown)
- Marion Wahlgren, Chicago, IL (relationship unknown)
- Bessie Mathias, Denver, CO (executor, seems to be a neighbor and friend)

Others listed as heirs-at-law:

- Grace Keys, Melbourne, FL, niece (daughter of Elizabeth Gillespie Winslow, James' sister)
- Mamie Jamison, Melbourne, FL, niece (daughter of Elizabeth Gillespie Winslow, James' sister)
- Alex Winslow, Melbourne, FL, nephew (probably William Alexander, son of Elizabeth Gillespie Winslow, James' sister)
- Bessie Pratt, Fenton, MI, niece (daughter of Elizabeth Gillespie Winslow, James' sister)
- Fannie Gamber, Linden, MI, niece (daughter of Elizabeth Gillespie Winslow, James' sister)

Then Diane sent me a copy of James' pension application for his service in the Civil War (information that her father Thomas had acquired from the National Archives). Here are some summary points made by Diane from those documents:

1. Dept. of the Interior "Bureau of Pensions" form, dated January 2, 1915. It was filled out (apparently) by James K. Gillespie. It states his place of birth as "Armagh, Ireland" and his date of birth as "October 8, 1845." It also lists his son, John Wilbur Gillespie, who was born 10-19-1874. It answers questions about his marriage to Isabell Greer, including the fact that they were married at her father's house in Bloomfield, Oakland County, Michigan, by Rev. Hill, on 12-24-1873. I love the sweet line in this in which James is asked about previous marriages, and his written answer is: "Neither of us

were ever married before. We are living together over 41 years and expect to go on to the end."

2. Another Dept. of the Interior "Bureau of Pensions" document, dated November 27, 1897! There is no "K" for a middle name here, and Isabelle on this one has an "e" on the end of her name. James Gillespie states in this one that he lives in Leadville, Colorado. It asks "What record of marriage exists?" He writes: Witnesses Emma Greer ... Leadville, Colorado ... Mary G (?) Parks, Southfield, Michigan. Now I'm wondering...is the "G" in Mary G. Parks a "G" for Gillespie?!! I momentarily thought it might be Parker instead of Parks, with all those Parkers in that branch. Also, I am wondering if "witnesses" meant "witnesses" at the actual wedding, or just living witnesses that could attest to the fact that they knew they had been married. He crosses off the next question on the form, so he can continue on about what happened to the actual marriage certificate (I believe). Looks like he writes: Certificate Burned. (or ruined? burned, more likely). Witnesses Miss Jennie Wilkins, 3530 Ind. Ave. Chicago Mrs. J.W. Westlake (sp?) Denver, Colo.Mr. John Greer ... Bloomfield, Mich (!!)

Next, there is a section asking if they have any living children, and he fills in: our son J. Wilbur Gillespie, born Oct. 19, 1874. This leads me to believe that they called their son "Wilbur," rather than John.

From the research I had done on the Greer family, I knew that Emma Greer was Belle's sister, and Emma had become a school teacher in Leadville. Another brother of Belle's, Charles Greer, also lived in Leadville for quite awhile. So I think that James and Belle came to Colorado because they did have family here; two of Belle's siblings. Because of John Wilber's academic interests, it's easy to imagine they would move from the mountains to Denver where John could start his education.

Finally in this flurry of information exchanges with Diane came a brief email reporting the results of a search Diane had run looking for, I assume, records containing the name Greer. Here is the content of what she sent me:

1411 GILLISPIE, ELIZABETH, Intestate, filed 9 March 1857, died 17 February 1857. Family: Nancy Gillispie, sister, Jane Greer - wife of Robert M., sister, Thomas Gillispie, brother, Robert, James and Sarah Gillispie, ½ brothers and sister. Adm: Robert M. Green. Property in Bloomfield Twp.

I was busy and distracted that day, and after quickly skimming Diane's message I replied to her that the information she sent looked interesting. But it wasn't until several hours later that I closely read her message in enough detail to realize the possible significance of a Michigan Gillespie having three half-siblings who just happened to be named Robert, James, and Sarah. What are the odds?

I was so excited that I could hardly contain myself. I wrote to Diane immediately that I thought she had discovered something major! She wrote back that she herself hadn't quite realized what she'd found. Ahhh, but now there it was! Sometimes you want to mark the calendar when there is an important discovery that begins to shift the course of one's understanding. This particular date was January 5, 2010. We posted what we found online and shortly thereafter in an online Gillespie newsletter. The evidence connecting OUR Gillespies and the Greers was mounting! But now we had an even bigger and rather obvious question – who was Elizabeth Gillispie?

Introducing Elizabeth Gillespie

Here is a summary of what we know about Elizabeth Gillespie so far:

- Elizabeth Gillispie purchased land April 4, 1833 - 78.45 acres in Oakland County. Certificate says "of Orange County, New York". Note that I do NOT find any land purchases for any other Gillespie during this time period. This was the time when the government was offering land in

Michigan at a great deal, and this is how a great number of families in New York and New Jersey decided to come west. The Erie Canal had just opened, the threat of 'savages' was greatly reduced, and because Michigan needed to have a certain number of population before it could be go from being a territory to a state, land was being offered at near give-away prices. Elizabeth Gillespie was thus one of those FIRST buyers of Michigan land, land that had never been owned by anybody and was for the first time being surveyed and sold by the U.S. Government.

- The Dibeau Marriage Index lists a marriage for Elizabeth in Oakland County, Michigan.

GORDON PETER - GORDON ELIZABETH - GILLISPIE 08 XXX 1834
-- see researcher file CTY REC# VOL 1

Source: http://files.usgwarchives.net/mi/oakland/vitals/marriages/dbn-sep2009_g.txt

This part is curious. Peter must have died or left right away as there is no trace of him in any of the following records of Elizabeth's life.

- I do not find Elizabeth Gillispie by that name in either the 1840 or 1850 census. However, in the 1840 census of Bloomfield, Oakland, Michigan there is a woman named Elizabeth Grodon (ancestry transcribes it as Gordon). She is listed right next door to Thomas Gillespie, and she is the only one in her household, age 40-50 (this fits above as she seems to be 10 years younger than Thomas). In the 1850 census, there is E. Gordon, F, age 62, from Ireland, living next to James and Jane Greer (ages 65 and 66). Jane Greer has been identified as a Gillespie, and a sister of Elizabeth.
- There is an Elizabeth Gillespie buried in Franklin Cemetery, died Feb 17, 1857, age 70 (b 1787). There are a number of other Gillespies and Greers in this same cemetery.

Off to the Family History Library

In March, 2010, I was able to travel to the Family History Library (FHL) in Salt Lake City, Utah. The FHL attracts many genealogists because it has microfilm records of most, if not all, of the city and state records from all the states in the U.S. When looking for very old records, it's incredibly expensive and time-consuming to request records from state governments, and even then you're not guaranteed to receive anything useful. By going to the FHL, you can quickly (comparatively speaking) see for yourself what records are available and then if your ancestors records are among them.

I will say that going to the FHL was both an exhausting and educational experience. I somehow had the idea that if I just got myself TO the FHL, all the answers would come floating into my consciousness. Ahhhh, but it was serious work. I was at the library for six 10- or 12-hour days, and by the third day I will admit that I was ready to come home. I wasn't finding anything I didn't already know and I was becoming increasingly convinced that I had not only made a bad decision in coming to Salt Lake City, but also that my pursuit of the past by devoting so much time and energy was perhaps even a shameful waste. That was my low point, about 4 p.m. on Wednesday. Quite half-heartedly I decided to look at one more microfilm. By 5 p.m., I quietly left the library to cross the street and sit in the park surrounding the Mormon Tabernacle where the world famous choir rehearses and performs. I just sat, breathing in the cool evening air and trying to understand the teary emotions I was feeling. It seemed partly to be disbelief but maybe it was simply wonder. I had just found the proof that our Robert Gillespie came to Michigan to collect on his inheritance from his half-sister, Elizabeth Gillespie.

To summarize the process of finding this proof, I had first been scouring the probate records for days looking for information pertaining to the estate of Elizabeth Gillespie. Here is a summary of what was there:

1. Nancy Gillespie petitioned the court on March 9, 1857 saying that Elizabeth died intestate and had \$900 of estate to settle. She named the heirs-at-law as herself a sister, Jane Greer a sister, Thomas Gillespie a brother, and Robert, James, and Sarah as half-siblings.
2. Nancy requested that the administrator be assigned as Robert M. Greer. (Whoever wrote the abstract assumed Robert was husband of Jane Greer, but nowhere does this record say that and in fact Robert M Greer is the son of Jane Gillespie Greer.)
3. On April 7, 1857 it was agreed that a notice was run in the Pontiac Gazette (to see if Elizabeth owed anybody money I suppose), and then the judge did assign Robert M. Greer as the administrator.
4. On the same date, a bond was set. In skimming these documents it appears that the administrator had three months to give an inventory of the estate and then a year to wrap things up.

But there the trail ended; I could find no subsequent probate records for the estate of Elizabeth Gillespie. After coming so far and now wit's end.

So what to do? When I get the most stuck, I go back over What do I know? or What do I think I know? The first point on the list of what I knew absolutely was that Elizabeth Gillespie owned land in Michigan. If she was dead, the land had to go to somebody, so perhaps it is logical to think there was something in the land records?

Et voila. Here is a summary of the land records I found:

4 Feb 1833: Elizabeth, of Orange Co NY, purchased 78.45 acres, the west ½ of the northwest ¼ of section 18 in 2N 10E Oakland County, MI. On an 1872 map I found, Cranberry Lake is on the northeast part of this property.

28 May 1858: Robert M Greer, administrator of Elizabeth's estate, conveys to Robert Gillespie 40 acres of this land, the south ½ of the west ½ of the northwest ¼ of section 18 in 2N 10E Oakland County, Michigan. This document explicitly records that this transaction represents Robert's interests as heir in the estate of Elizabeth Gillespie, deceased. Since Robert was previously identified as a half-brother of Elizabeth, we now know with certainty that our Robert and this previously unknown Elizabeth were related.

29 Jul 1858: Robert M Greer quit claims the same property to Mary Slater, noting that she purchased it from Robert Gillespie: the south ½ of the west ½ of the northwest ¼ of section 18 in 2N 10E Oakland County, Michigan. Mary Slater is the step-daughter of Thomas Gillespie, who was the brother of Elizabeth but who also had been recently declared incompetent by Mary Slater! (yes, I think the situation here was very murky!).

Dec 1859: There were two transactions between Robert Gillespie and William Beesley, the husband of Robert's daughter Mary Jane (William Beesley and Mary Jane Gillespie married in 1849 in Quebec). Robert paid William Beesley \$500 for some land located, I believe, around Springfield, Michigan. Mary Jane Beesley signed the document with her husband, and Harriet Gillespie signed the document as a witness. On the same day, is another agreement of indenture between Robert Gillespie and William Beesley for the sum of \$300. This was perhaps Robert's mortgage?

22 Feb 1864: Meanwhile back with Elizabeth's estate in Bloomfield, Nancy Gillespie conveys her

interest in the estate of Elizabeth Gillespie deceased, to Mary Slater. The south ½ of the west ½ of the northwest ¼ of section 18 in 2N 10E Oakland County, Michigan.

1872 Map of Oakland County: Shows John Greer JR owns all the property that had once belonged to our Elizabeth Gillespie.

This picture is obviously complicated. For one thing, the estate administrator, Robert M Greer, died in 1859. For another, there are likely several more land records pertaining to this estate that we haven't found yet to understand the whole picture. And who got the north ½ of the west ½ of the northwest ¼ of section 18? If I had to guess, I would say James Greer got the north half (husband of Jane Gillespie), and then passed that section to his son John Greer (who would marry Isabelle Gillespie and become the father of our Belle Greer).

All of this complexity might explain somewhat why Robert Gillespie did not choose to settle in the Bloomfield area. He sold his inherited land right away, and moved northwest to the Springfield area where he settled. I really can't tell if there were bad feelings going around with all these transactions, but it seems entirely possible there might have been some. Whether or not there was bad blood, the Robert Gillespie family and the Greer family did not appear to cross paths in any family or professional context again. That is, until James H. Gillespie married Belle Greer in 1873.

Some Conclusions

The information found in both the probate records and the land records as they relate to the estate of Elizabeth Gillispie sheds new light on what has been known of the Gillespie family history and in particular our progenitor, Robert Gillespie. I believe the following updates should be written into The Gillespie Family Record:

- a) Based on the explicit relationships spelled out in the probate records, the children from John Gillespie's first marriage (or perhaps "other marriage" since we can't be sure the order of marriages) include, but may not be limited to: Thomas, Jane, Nancy, and Elizabeth. At least one of these children (Jane) is known to have married a Greer, which would fit the bill of Edith's description of daughters from John Gillespie's first marriage who married a Greer.
- b) The children of John Gillespie's first marriage came to Michigan from New York, thought to be Orange and/or Dutchess Counties. They arrived in Michigan in the early or mid-1830s, nearly 20 years before Robert came to Michigan from Canada in 1858. The Gillespie roots in Michigan begin sooner than we thought!
- c) Robert Gillespie came to Michigan specifically to collect inheritance in the form of land from his half-sister Elizabeth. He sold that land almost immediately to a different Gillespie relation and subsequently bought property from or with William Beesley (his daughter Mary Jane's husband) in the Springfield, Michigan area, 30 miles to the northwest of Bloomfield where he had inherited land. There he spent the rest of his life.

Still Unanswered

1. All of this new information started with wondering about Robert Gillespie's youngest son, James. James who married Belle Greer. Belle Greer whose mother was I. Gillespie (most likely the "I." stands for Isabelle). At this point, I still can't figure out who were Isabelle Gillespie's parents or what her relationship was to any of the "new" Gillespie's we have found in this research. If I had to prioritize answers I would most wish to find, this would be it.
2. The Gillespie-Greer question may have been raised first by looking at a death certificate in Colorado, but it was the probate records found in Michigan for Elizabeth Gillespie which

cements a tie between children of John Gillespie's first marriage and those of his second. And yet for all that, who was Elizabeth Gillespie?

3. What was Elizabeth's connection to Isabelle E Gillespie, the mother of our Belle Greer who married Robert's youngest son James? I thought Elizabeth might be Isabelle's mother, but then Isabelle would have been considered an heir and she is not. Maybe Isabelle was a) her daughter but estranged, b) a niece but in this case wouldn't she still be considered an heir? There must be some connection between these two women.
4. The Family Record refers to the Greers who married the Gillespie daughters emigrating to America, and from what I can tell in piecing together the dates, they would have come in the early 1800s. But where exactly did these Greers settle? All indications point to New York, but so far I can't find any concrete documentation. So if indeed they came to America and settled in New York, where exactly did they live for nearly 20 years before coming to Michigan in the mid-1830s?
5. It seems evident that there were not only Greers, but there were also other Gillespies in America long before OUR Gillespies even left Ireland for Canada. Several questions come up around this thought. The first question is who were the New York Gillespies? Based on the names I found in Michigan, there were other Gillespies besides the apparent children of John Gillespie's first marriage. Were these John's siblings or perhaps cousins? The second question is why did the children of the second marriage go to Canada and not to New York as apparently did the children of the first marriage? Usually families coming to the new world stuck together, and so it seems a little strange to me that some would come to America while others went to Canada. Whatever the reason, there was obviously some awareness of each other, because somehow the word of Elizabeth Gillespie's death in Michigan got to Canada. For whatever reason, James and Sarah declined on the inheritance, but Robert responded. Because he did, the Gillespie history in Michigan that we know was begun. If Robert had stayed in Canada, would his son Alexander still have married Sarah? Maybe, maybe not. If Alexander and Sarah had lived their lives together in Canada, would they have had the same children and the same life? Most likely not. But these last two questions are rhetorical really. I am, after all, here now to still wonder and be curious. Which leads to my last (for this moment) unanswered question.
6. Who were these wives of John Gillespie, both the first unnamed wife, and the second Sarah Woods? The Woods line is itself a subject that is begging for more research. But it should also be noted that we now have two pieces of separate documentation that say the mother of Robert as well as the mother of James (the two brothers who emigrated to Quebec) was named Jane Gillespie. Oh my. Can you see for yourself another can of worms?

Speculations

Finally, I have a few speculations, which are really no more than answers I make up in response to my own questions. Which is to say there is no factual basis for anything appearing in this section.

I just have a sense that something happened in the John Gillespie family that caused such bad feelings that different family members were literally scattered to the four winds. One thing that bothers me is that there simply is no mention whatever in Mary Gillespie Henderson's book about her grandfather John or having relations who went to America. It's quite possible that she simply didn't know. But what causes a family to pretend as if other family does not exist?

I think a lot about the times they came from. Our Gillespies supposedly originated in Scotland, and so how did their Scottish heritage impact their life in Ireland? The history of Ireland at the time was very volatile, both politically and religiously. I have always imagined that OUR Gillespies came to the new

world for religious freedom. They (or at least it was known of James) were quite Presbyterian, which was not the most popular thing to be in Ireland at the time. Given the time period when they came to Canada (late 1830s), it seems like a reasonable explanation to think they were motivated by religious reasons.

But now the lens has been widened. There were Gillespie/Greers who came to America much beforehand. In 1801, the Kingdom of Great Britain and the Kingdom of Ireland were merged into the United Kingdom, an event that was difficult for many to accept. Thomas Jefferson was elected U.S. President as Napoleon was coming into power, and then the War of 1812 between the U.S. and Britain. Where did these early-American Gillespie/Greers stand in the middle of all this? Surely there was struggle for them in America regarding who to support and why. Indeed, were they really safe at that time in America to live with their beliefs, whatever they were?

And were these early-American Gillespie/Greers in touch with those back in Ireland? Was the decision by the second set of children to come to Canada rather than America personal rather than practical? How did they nevertheless stay in contact with each other? Were there some family members who secretly kept in touch even though there were outward tensions?

And then there's the question of religion. Were the Greers Catholic? I realize it is a complete stereotype, but given that Belle Greer came from a family of 16 children, I find myself wondering. All families of the time were big, but maybe Catholic families were more so? Even so, it's hard to imagine Protestant Gillespies and Catholic Greers getting married in Ireland, even before emigrating to the new world. But maybe. Maybe this was a source of conflict in the family even before leaving Ireland. It's a point to wonder. I did some preliminary research about the history of the Catholic Church in Michigan. It does go back to early times before Michigan was a state (due to French influence from Canada). But I do not find much Catholic influence around Bloomfield, Michigan nor do I think the cemetery where the early Gillespie/Greers are all buried in Franklin is Catholic. So this angle might not be a factor at all in trying to understand who these relations were.

Still there is a sense I have of some rift. Maybe it ("it" being some kind of conflict that impacted the family members' relation to each other) started in Ireland and maybe shadows of it lurked in Canada, but I'm talking about Gillespie-Greer relations in Michigan. Once in Michigan, Robert quickly relocated to a different town from where the Greers had settled. Maybe this had only to do with already having plans to purchase property in Springfield through his son-in-law William Beesley. But I also can't help but notice that Robert's youngest son James, did not marry until after his father Robert died (soon thereafter in fact; which was also true of James' sister Harriet). Was this because Robert did not approve of the people Harriet and James had chosen to be with? Did James and his older brother Alexander continue to have the same or similar issues? It appears from James' will that when he died in 1931 the only relations he was in touch with was the children of his sister Elizabeth Winslow. Even though he had many, many other nieces and nephews from his siblings Alexander, Harriet, and Sarah, only Elizabeth's children and Greer relations are mentioned in James' will. Given Gillespie family loyalties, something about this doesn't seem quite right. Who were the Gillespies in relation to the Greers and what really happened between them all? This is a question that may always remain in one form or another.

With that said, let me paraphrase from a book I have lately been reading:

In traditional Western thought, answers follow questions. With intuition, questions follow answers. One question will lead to one or more impressions, which will suggest other images and other questions, which will in turn suggest yet other questions – even those you haven't thought to ask. In a sense no question can be asked without raising still other questions. A belief is simply a question at rest.