

**A Study of
Mixed Race DNA Matches
Tracing Back To
Washington County, PA**

Possible Gillespie or Woods Connections

Revision 4

by M.A. Schaefer

4 July 2019

Update 6 November 2019

Update 30 December 2019

Update 25 November 2020

Introduction

The subject of all my genealogy research to date has pertained to Caucasian peoples who migrated to North America from Europe and the British Isles. And now, thanks to DNA testing and matching, a bigger picture starts to appear, one where it is clear to me that people of other races were not only present on the North American continent long before the Europeans arrived, but those people as well as other peoples of color arriving from other places intermixed with Europeans, whether or not by choice. This realization, which comes to me with the DNA-match suggestion that my own family tree is not entirely white, has given me months of pause. To think of early American history as merely an extension of European history is naive at best, and incredibly ignorant at worst. For me, genealogy is once again the context that opens the door on the much bigger questions that still loom over our lives today.

With that said, I'm new to this area of research. And I am honestly baffled at the empty feeling of not knowing where to even begin. In the following sections of this article, I describe in more detail how my research lead to Washington County, Pennsylvania and looking at families that were labeled as either "free colored" or "mulatto." It has taken me some time to even understand those labels, and perhaps I don't yet have a clear understanding. But I have to start somewhere, so here's what I think so far:

- Free Colored: I believe this means a person of color, probably African, who was not living in slavery prior to Emancipation. One in ten African Americans were already free before the Civil War started.
- Mulatto: A mulatto person was, I believe, one of mixed race. I think this means some mix of Native American, African, and Caucasian.
- These terms could, apparently, be used interchangeably. See the appendix at the end of this article for more reading on this subject.

I also visited the Family History Library (FHL) in SLC this year (2019), which I usually look forward to not only because of access to vast resources, but because the library is staffed by members from all over the world who are assigned to help patrons with specific family history questions. I spent about 30 minutes talking to an expert who was, according to her name tag, of Native American descent, and assigned as the expert on the floor pertaining to the United States research. I explained to her that I needed advice about how to research mulatto and free people of color in early Pennsylvania. She referred me to the online research wiki (see appendix). That was it. I was dumb-founded. I went to the library catalog and typed the word "mulatto" and got a return of 103 results out of the billions of records held by the FHL, and maybe a handful of those records apply to Pennsylvania. Not much to go on.

Luckily, the internet provides some interesting reading (see appendix). Because these recent DNA matches point to my Scot-Irish families (possibly also English), I am reminded of the need for a further clarification of terms:

- Irish: Much is written about how peoples of color inherited Irish names because they lived together with or in proximity of poor and low-class Irish immigrants, who were indentured servants and also abused in early American history. In my mind, I think of these Irish as Irish Catholics, and I do have some Irish Catholics in my family tree. According to my research, they started arriving in NYC after the close of the American Civil War.

- Scot-Irish: These people were also known as Ulster Scots. They were Scottish Presbyterians who left or were forcibly removed from Scotland in the 1600s and relocated on plantations in Northern Ireland, in the province of Ulster. Later attempts to force these Presbyterians into the Church of England caused two waves of Scot-Irish emigration to North America, first from 1710-1776, and after the Revolution from 1780-1820. Highland Scots, who typically settled in mountainous areas, were anti-slavery, and Lowland Scots and Scot-Irish were more commonly pro-slavery.¹ (See Appendix, Source #4.) My Gillespie family are thought to have come from Glasgow (Lowlands) before County Armagh in Northern Ireland. To our knowledge, none of those who came to the U.S. lived in the South, and only one Woods relation is known to have migrated to Georgia before the Civil War. At least two members of the Michigan branch of Gillespies served for the Union during the Civil War.

So here I sit with many, many more questions than answers, especially to consider them within the painfully violent history of racial inequality in this country. And yet genealogy has given me the ground I stand on. The stories of all people matter, and finding those stories requires wanting to know them along with employing some mix of determination, patience, and, quite often, luck. With that said, I will document the clues and the research I've done to date, and post the information where it can be found by others. It is my hope that between time, technology advances, previously undiscovered sources, and other persistent researchers, the stories behind the DNA matches will find their way to daylight.

Ethnicity Matches²

The first comment I will make here is that the ethnic estimations made by ancestry.com are, in my mind, somewhat arbitrary. The ethnic categories have changed every few years as ancestry gets more people tested and comes up with new algorithms. In fact the ethnic percentages reported here have changed at least twice even since I started this article in July 2019. We can't base too many conclusions on these ethnic estimations, but they give us some general geographical idea of where our ancestors came from.

Aside from the inexactness of the ethnic estimations, there is also the point that autosomal DNA testing also includes some degree of randomness. The ethnic percentages reported for me and my sister are quite different, even though we have the same heritage. I think of autosomal DNA testing this way: DNA from both parents gets combined in a bowl to make soup. As each of their children comes along, each one reaches into the bowl of DNA soup for a scoop. The percentages of ingredients that each child receives is random. For example, my sister got a much larger scoop from Germanic Europe than I did, even though we both descend from many Germans. This is why the DNA companies encourage several people of the same family to be tested – because it is the combined picture of the children that gives a more accurate picture of the past.

With all those caveats in place, in the last year I began to notice that I have some DNA matches where the testers have some significant African ethnicity. Since I do not have any African ethnicity, I am curious about how we connect. After some study of the different matches and shared matches, here is a summary of what I have found so far:

1 Supposedly 95% of Scot-Irish immigrants “ended up” settling in the South (ie, south-eastern U.S.). See Appendix, Source #10.

2 I refer to the autosomal DNA test administered by ancestry.com.

As of December 2019, I can recognize 8 testers,³ 5 males and 3 females who match me and who also have high African ethnicity. All of these testers, who I will call **Group 1**, show up as a 4th-6th cousin match to me, as well as to four other ancestry users who are known relations of mine (maternal side), who I will call **Group 2**. Keeping in mind the caveats described in the Introduction, the following table shows the top ethnicity estimates of some members from each group. Note that because three of the testers in Group 1 appear to be related, I have removed two of them from the group for purposes of this analysis.

Tester	Eng & NWEU %	Ire %	Scot %	Germanic EU %	Combined African % ⁶
Grp 1-A	26	0	3	7	58
Grp 1-B	18	0	12	0	60
Grp 1-C	5	0	10	1	76
Grp 1-D	0	47	13	0	29
Grp 1-E	10	8	31	0	38
Grp 2-A	31	20	14	29	0
Grp 2-B	43	5	39	3	0
Grp 2-C	37	9	42	3	0
Grp 2-D	3	0	82	13	0
Grp 2-E	0	13	54	0	0

Group 1 Analysis

Four testers in Group 1 have the surname of PAGE in their family tree, three of four leading to an individual named James Maxwell Page, born 1907 in VA and died 1980 in PA. This individual apparently had two wives, Fannie E. Thorpe and Myrtle Clemons. Descendants of both families are represented in the matches, so that indicates the DNA match is probably coming from the paternal PAGE line.

The parents of James Maxwell Page were James Oliver Page 1878-1929 and Bertha May Kelley 1885-1955. I can only follow the Page line back to VA just before the Civil War. But the Kelley line is interesting. Not only does the surname suggest Irish heritage, but the family lines seem to date back before the Revolution. In addition, Kelley and related families, such as Fullum and Proctor, sometimes described as Mulatto, were all living as free blacks in, for the most part, Pennsylvania. Jacob R. Kelley served with the colored troops during the Revolution, as did, supposedly Jacob Proctor, although more research would be required on this latter claim.

³ I have decided not to list the specific ancestry users in this article, especially without their permission. If you want to inquire about generalities of these users, or wish to contact them directly, please contact me and we can navigate the communication from there.

⁶ The top African ethnicities that all members of Group 1 share are Nigeria, and Cameroon, Congo, & Southern Bantu Peoples, so I combined those percentages in this chart.

Which brings me to the latest match in Group 1 who does not have Page in her family tree, but rather the surnames of Milton and Patterson, which can be tied back to Jacob Proctor. It's really quite incredible that we are looking at so many mixed race families living in America during Revolutionary times, and indeed participating in the fight against the British – important history to acknowledge and honor.

Group 2 Analysis

Knowing my own family tree best, I can easily identify the matches in Group 2, and they all have the GILLESPIE surname in common. To give some context about my Gillespie family, here is a very abbreviated account as given on [my research website](#):

Our progenitor is known to be JOHN GILLESPIE, thought to be born around 1760 in County Armagh, Northern Ireland. According to the family story, John's father was of Glasgow, Scotland. John Gillespie's first wife remains unknown. Their known children, born between 1780-1800, were Nancy, Jane, Elizabeth, and Thomas. We believe there might have been another son named John born during this time who could be the one mentioned in family lore as having lived to be 102 years old. Several children of John's first marriage emigrated to NY just before the War of 1812. They lived in the Hudson Valley area of NY for several decades before migrating to the Michigan Territory in the early 1830s.

The second wife of John Gillespie was Sarah or Jane (or Sarah Jane?) WOODS. The children from the second marriage were born between 1800-1812, and include Sarah, Robert, James, and Alexander. Children from the second marriage emigrated to Quebec from 1837-1847. One of those children later migrated to Michigan around 1855 where they took up residence in the same county that the children of the first marriage had settled 20 years before.

With regard to the current question of DNA matches, the most interesting of the Group 2 matches is the one who descends from the Canadian Gillespie branch, which separates her from all the other Group 2 matches mentioned, including me, who all descend from the Michigan Gillespie branch. The Michigan line of Gillespies is where French, English, and German ethnicities were introduced by marriage to my maternal family tree. The fact that there is one match in Group 2 who does not have the Michigan ethnic influences causes me to lean toward even earlier Gillespies as the source of our common ancestry with Group 1.

But we must also remember that all my relations descend from John Gillespie *and* Jane Woods. The Woods family also lived in Northern Ireland at the time of emigration, but very possibly they came from England or Scotland before that. Other recent DNA matches to me showed that at least one Woods relation migrated from Quebec to Georgia before the Civil War, so there is reason to consider that perhaps it was the Woods family rather than the Gillespie family that is generating the DNA match here between Group 1 and Group 2.

Census Summary

Even though we don't know if the Proctor families (Group 1) indeed intersected with anybody with the Gillespie or Woods surname (Group 2), given the DNA evidence, it's certainly worth asking the question, Were there Gillespies⁷ and Woods in early Washington County, PA? There were. Here is a summary of such families found in the early federal censuses in Washington County, PA; townships are noted in brackets:

1790 Washington, PA

- Gillespie: George, James, William, Neal, Henry
- Wood: Joseph, John, Daniel, Benjamin, Ebenezer
- Woods: Hug, William, Samuel, John, Jacob, Jeremiah

1800 Washington, PA

- Gillespie: [Hopewell] – James, Thomas, Elizabeth
- Woods: [Pike Run] – John; [Canton] – Henry, William; [Chartiers] – James, John (2x); others

1810 Washington, PA

- Gillespie: [Hopewell] – James, Thomas (2x), John; [Cross Creek] – Thomas; [E. Bethlehem] – Niel; [Pike Run] – Neal
- Woods: [Hopewell] – Nathaniel; [Chartiers] – John, William; [Canton] – Stephen; others

1820 Washington, PA

- Gillespie: [Hopewell] – James, Mrs.; Pike Run – Neal
- Wood: [Pike Run] – John; [E. Bethlehem] – Ruth; [W. Bethlehem] – Samuel, Thomas
- Woods: [Washington – G, [Hopewell] – Mrs; [Chartiers] – N; [Fallowfield] – Elijah; others

1830 Washington, PA

- Gillespie: [Cross Creek – Mary, Nathaniel; [Pike Run] – Neal; [Hopewell] – Robert
- Wood: [Pike Run] – Thomas, Joseph
- Woods: [Bethlehem] – Addis, Edward; [Cross Creek] – David; [Chartiers – Nathaniel

1840 Washington, PA

- Gillespie: [Cross Creek] – William (white, next to Wm & Zachariah Patterson, free colored), John, Nathaniel
- Wood: [Chartiers] – Elizabeth, David
- Woods: [E. Bethlehem] – William; [Chartiers] – John; [E. Pike Run] – Joseph, Thomas; others

⁷ Betty Gillespie Pollack is a long-time researcher of Gillespie families in Washington County, PA. For questions pertaining to those Gillespie family groups, you may reach her at bgpollackgen@gmail.com.

The 1840 census is, of course, of particular interest. There we find a Gillespie family living next door to a free colored family named Patterson. Was there some connection there that could account for the DNA matches?

I do not find Proctors in Washington County before 1820 (Jacob), but that doesn't mean they weren't there. I do, however, find many Patterson families in Washington County as early as 1790 (Patterson is another mulatto family that married into the Proctor family).

Conclusions

Given the latest recategorization of ethnicity estimates (as of 11/25/20) by ancestry.com, we can see from the table on page 4 that everybody between the two groups share some Scot genes. That alone is evidence supporting the idea that GILLESPIE or a closely related family group is the source of our DNA matches.

I think it's probable that the common ancestor between Groups 1 and 2 likely dates to before 1800, and it may be that we never pinpoint the exact connection. If any of the assumptions I have made in this article are incorrect, then we are barking up the wrong tree(s)! But if they are correct, and the matches from Group 1 are associated with mixed race families who lived in America pre-Revolution, then there were definitely Gillespie and/or Woods families who emigrated to North America earlier than I have been able to document. Indeed, there were several Gillespie families in the area of Orange County, NY who served in the Revolution and who now seem to have a remote connection to my Michigan family line. It's entirely possible that one Gillespie from that New York family group found his or her way to Washington County, PA.

There's plenty to be curious about for enterprising researchers with some time.

Future Research

- I'd like to learn more about the colored troops who served during the Revolution.
- What brought the free colored families to Washington County, PA?
- How long had those families been free?
- See Sources #3 and #9 in the Appendix. Both of these refer to a register that was kept by the counties to register peoples of color, even, I believe, for those who were free. Locating the register for Washington County, PA might prove insightful.
- I'm not completely certain, but I think that all matches in Group 1 trace back to Jacob Proctor. If I understand correctly, he would have had to have been issued "papers" or a certificate showing his right to freedom. I wonder if that would have been recorded in Maryland? Surely that would have been necessary before the move to western PA.
- In my recent research of Gillespie families in Ulster/Orange county, New York, only one stands out in my mind as having owned slaves, William Gillespie 1737-1813 (enumerated with slaves in the 1790 & 1800 census, one other free person in 1810). William's will did not mention slaves. It might be worth trying to locate more information regarding slaves and free people of color in Ulster/Orange, New York in early 1800s.

Appendix A: Reference and Reading

1. "[African American Resources for Pennsylvania](#)," Research Wiki, FamilySearch, access 27 December 2019
2. [African American Genealogy](#) by Meaghan E. H. Siekman,
3. [Genealogy Research Techniques for Finding Your Free People of Color](#) by Lisa Cooke, 15 Feb 2017
4. "[Scottish and scotch-irish americans](#)"⁸ by Mary A. Hess, Countries and Their Cultures
5. "[How Green Was My Surname; Via Ireland, a Chapter in the Story of Black America](#)" by S. Lee Jamison, New York Times, 17 Mar 2003
6. "[How Blacks have Irish Last Names](#)" by emcfields, Triangle Below Canal Street, 4 Feb 2015
7. "[Black Irish Identities: The complex relationship between Irish and African Americans](#)" by Frances Mulraney, IrishCentral, 21 Oct 2019
8. [The Scotch-Irish in America](#): Proceedings of the Scotch-Irish Society of America, Third Congress, Louisville, KY, 1891; p. 235
9. "[Washington County, PA Negro Register](#)" by Lee Cook, AfriGeneas Slave Research Forum, 13 Jan 2005
10. "[Review of James Webb's Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America](#)" by Mackubin T. Owens, Ashbrook, Ashland University, December 2004

8 There is a fair amount of debate about using the term "Scotch" for Scot-Irish peoples. Just saying.