

**A Case of
Two Sgt. William Gillespie's
In the American Revolution**

By M.A. Schaefer
12 December 2019
Boulder, CO

Revision 1

Introduction

My research work over the last several months has been about understanding better the Gillespie families of early Ulster/Orange counties in New York. At this point, there is some small DNA evidence to suggest there is a connection between my Michigan Gillespie's and those who resided in the Ulster/Orange areas of New York for decades before, during, and after the American Revolution. My interest is to better understand those early Gillespie family groups in New York using good old-fashioned paper evidence. Of course much of that paper evidence is missing at this point, and so we must also apply analysis and logic to the records we do have. This task has always been daunting,¹ but it seems that my interest is renewed – always an important research ingredient!

So this latest round of research has caused a much deeper study of the Revolutionary records. There are surviving service rolls, and compilations of individual service records, bounty land awards, and pension applications. Of these, I have landed on the bounty land awards as a possible source of identifying family groups. In particular, I have been zooming in on two family groups of men named James Gillespie.² In this recent research, I had documented that William Gillespie was the administrator of James' estate,³ and that James' bounty land in Marcellus, NY (lot #34) was delivered to [C.C Schoonmaker](#) for William Gillespie. I further commented in my [blog](#) that because C. C. Schoonmaker was from the Shawangunk area, Wm. Gillaspys was probably William Gillespy 1737-1813 who was enumerated in Shawangunk in 1790. Because this William Gillespy was apparently not an heir of James, I have speculated that he was likely a first cousin.

However, there was another detail that I did not previously mention with regard to bounty land in Marcellus. Lot #39 in Marcellus was awarded to Sgt. William Gillespy who had served in the NY 1st Regiment. Because that regiment was mostly populated by men from other NY counties,⁴ my initial assessment was that Sgt. William Gillespy of the 1st Regiment was probably not related to James Gillespy of the 4th Regiment, and for that reason, Sgt. William was probably not the administrator of James' estate. But now, we have uncovered some new evidence to suggest otherwise.⁵ This article is about exploring the claims in this new source and whether any of my previous conclusions need adjusting.

Before going on, I want to acknowledge the authors of this new source. At this point in my research career, I've seen a lot of the hand-typed family histories, and this is the first one I've seen that gives any source details to go along with the narrative. Unfortunately, this compliment can't be universally applied to this text, but the compliment remains. What counts most is the effort to record what we learn. Thank you to those who came long before me and who have given so much to this work.

1 [Case Studies of Gillespie Families in Dutchess & Orange, NY 1800-1830](#), Schaefer, 2012; [Case Studies of Gillespie Families in Ulster County, NY, 1800-1850](#); Schaefer, 2013

2 [Summary of Two Gillespy/Gillespie Family Groups Serving Ulster/Orange, New York in the American Revolution](#), Schaefer, November 2019. See p 3.

3 The one who served in the 4th Regiment under Walker, died in action, 1780.

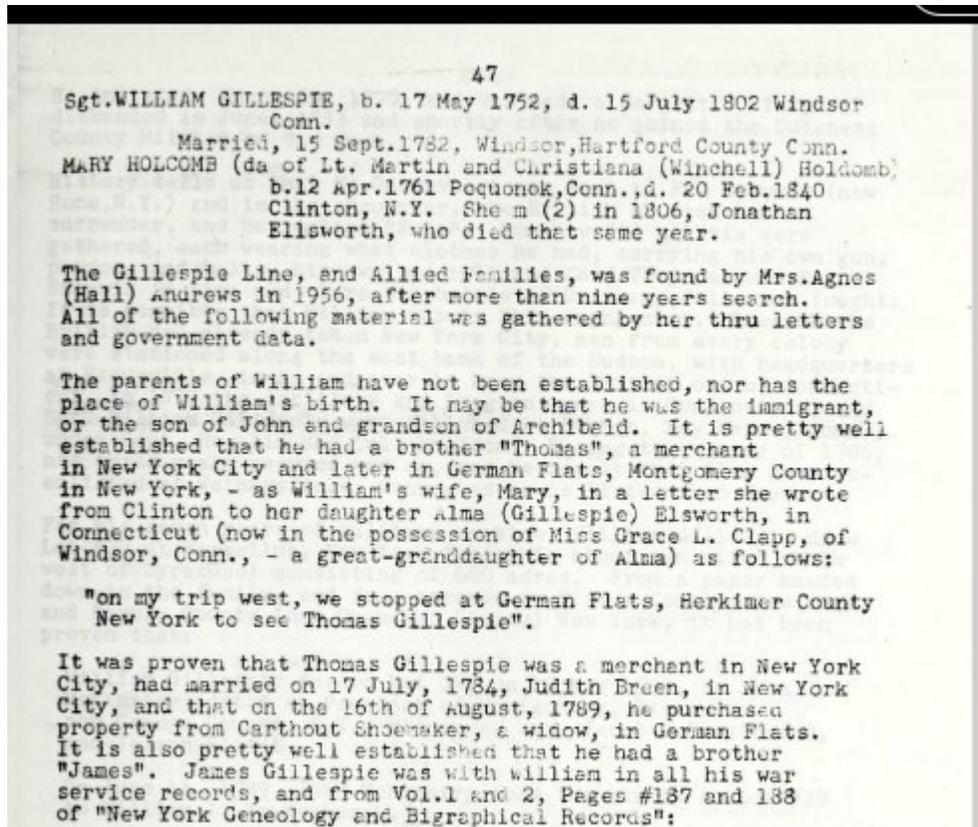
4 [New York Regiments in the Continental Army](#); access 4 December 2019.

5 Special thanks to D. Hart for discovering this new source: “[So That's Why](#)” Ancestors and Descendants Avon Stacy Hall and Carrie Isa Wilmot, by Alta Eliza Wilmot, Agnes Hall Andrews, and Catherine H. Cronin, privately published, 1960; pp. 47-50.

The New Claims

I don't usually like to paste source material directly into my articles (I have to work at keeping my articles shorter as it is), but in this case, I think doing so provides the best way to reference the exact wording of the source. I will label each image here and then refer to the content of that image by the label in later discussion.

Part 1



Part 2

"May 26, 1783, Judge Landon issued at Rombout, New York, letters of administration to William Gillespy, a Sargent in the 1st N.Y.Reg. upon the estate of James Gillespy, private in the old 4th N.Y.Reg."

As "Land Bounty", James drew Lot #34 at Marcellus, N.Y. and William drew Lot #39 at Marcellus, - each 600 acres.

William's service record in the Revolution covered seven years. This is proven by the "New York in the Revolution":

Page #17, The Line, 1st Reg. Col. Goose Van Schauk, Lt. Col. Cornelius Van Dyke, Capt. Cornelius T. Jansen, - William Galaspy

Page #40, The Line 3rd Reg. Col. Clinton Gansevoort, Capt. Cornelius T. Jansen - James Gillaspy; William Gillaspy.

He is also listed in the 4th Reg. Ulster Co. Militia of N.Y. for Land Bounty Rights, - and in "Connecticut Men in the Revolution" he is listed: Wethersfield, 1st Reg. of Artillery and Dragoons.

Part 3

48

He enlisted March 20, 1777, and was made a Sargent. They disbanded in June, 1783 and shortly after he joined the Dutchess County Militia of New York.

History tells us that Co. Gansevoort was sent to Ft. Stanwix (now Rome, N.Y.) and in the encounter, the British ordered him to surrender, and he replied "Nuts". Somehow 800 militia were gathered, each wearing what clothes he had, carrying his own gun, powder, and balls, his own bed roll and food. They reached Ft. Stanwix in time and there the battle of Oriskany Falls was fought. It is possible that William was in this engagement. Because the British had already taken New York City, men from every colony were stationed along the east bank of the Hudson, with headquarters at Peeksville, in an endeavor to keep the British out of Connecticut. In 1779 the Artillery and Dragoons were in Connecticut, and Sgt. William Gillespie was stationed at Durham, New Haven, Conn., under Capt. Hogelin and Col. Sheldon. During the winter of 1780, his three years service was up, and he may at that time have re-enlisted at Wethersfield, Conn., as he is listed from there.

For his seven years of military service, William Gillespie drew Lot #39 at Marcellus, New York, (which is about ten miles south west of Syracuse) consisting of 600 acres. From a paper handed down in the family, and from records in Ulster County, New York and Cayuga County (now Onandago County) New York, it has been proven that:

William Gillespie deeded Lot 39, on 17 May 1788, to John McKinstry, dated at Precinct of Montgomery, Ulster Co., now Orange County, N.Y. Witnesses were Jacob B. Bookstaver, and Joseph Elliot.

On June 11, 1789, John McKinstry sold the rights to Lot #39 to William J. Vredenburgh.

Part 4

to William J. Vredenburg.

In 1790, Vredenburg filed a claim against any Bounty lands due Sgt. William Gillespie, who served 7 years in the Revolution. This claim is on file in Washington, D.C.

On the 23rd of December, 1815, Jacob Bookstaver appeared before the Court of Ulster County, stating that he knew William Gillespie personally, that he was a Sargent for 7 years in the 1st Regiment, and saw him sign the deed for Lot 39.

William had sold his Lot #39, 600 acres, at Marcellus, for 2 or 10 pounds sterling. However, the sale of the property seems to have been questioned from 1789 to 1815.

During the winter of 1780, while he was stationed in Connecticut, he met Mary Holcomb, of Poquonock, Connecticut, and they probably had a Civil Marriage. (This was quite common in that turbulent time of war, with ministers few and far between visits.) They had a daughter, named Mary in 1781, who they proudly registered in their family bible. On September 15, 1782 they were married, perhaps the first time William was able to get back from the war, and a minister available. This should have been a happy

Note: The source continues on, but the pages included here contain the information pertaining to this article's discussion.

Discussion

I think of these family history sources as both a blessing and a curse. They are always full of lovely details and/or clues that you couldn't find elsewhere. But in my years of research, I have also discovered that these sources often contain a story about one individual built around all the available documents containing *a name*, when in the end, all the available documents do not apply to the same individual. This has led to countless hours trying to differentiate which documents belong to which individuals of the same name. Despite this experience, I still push to keep an open mind about the contents of this new source. So how to break this down?

In the following sections, I am going to discuss the points that pertain to my recent ideas about how anybody named William Gillespie was related to James Gillespie of the 4th Regiment (Marcellus Lot #34). There are several other points to investigate and perhaps debate (like how was Thomas Gillespie of German Flatts related?), but that can be covered at another time. This article is an exploration of the points that will help to clarify my previous research and conclusions about Gillespie bounty land in Marcellus.

Letters of Administration

For me, the most eye-popping tidbit in this source is at the top of [Part 2](#) (source citation at the bottom of Part 1). Assuming that the reference to Rombout applies to Dutchess County,⁶ I searched in vain for probate records that started that early (1783). It was then pointed out to me that Rondout in Ulster County was more likely the location being referenced. But still, no probate records in Ulster going back to 1783. At which point, I was forced to track down the [NYGB&R volume](#) so kindly noted in the source. Sure enough, there was an article called "Helps for New York Genealogists communicated by

⁶ See [Rombout Patent](#); access 4 December 2019.

Henry R. Stiles, M.D.” The information quoted is apparently from a memorandum book thought to belong to Judge Jared Landon who was a resident of Suffolk County on Long Island. The memorandum book is full of probate entries that were ruled upon in Rondout and Kingston between 1782-1784 when the British were still occupying New York City, and American government officials were still shifting around to get things done.

Assuming this source is a true transcription of the memorandum book found among manuscripts maintained (at the time) by the Long Island Historical Society in Brooklyn, then it does indeed appear that Sgt. William Gillespy who served in the NY 1st Regiment was assigned administrator of the estate of James Gillespy of the NY 4th Regiment, the latter having died while in action in 1780. So indeed my first assumption was incorrect – the one that says Sgt. William Gillespie of the 1st Regiment who was granted Marcellus Lot #39 was not the same William Gillespie, administrator for James of the 4th Regiment who was granted Marcellus Lot #34. OK! As the GPS would say: Recalculating..... To restate the situation in this new light:

Sgt. William Gillespy of the NY 1st Regiment received bounty land in Marcellus, Lot #39, for his own service. He was also the administrator for James Gillespy of the NY 4th Regiment who died in service in 1780. The heirs of James also received land in Marcellus, Lot #34.

Marcellus Lot #39

It seems to me that the four claims at the bottom of [Part 3](#) and the top of [Part 4](#) can be verified:

1. In 1788, Sgt. William deeded Lot #39 to McKinstry,⁷ witness Bookstaver
2. In 1789, McKinstry sold the rights Lot #39 to Vredenburgh
3. In 1790, Vredenburgh filed a claim against the bounty land due Sgt. William.
4. In 1825, Bookstaver appeared in Ulster court to say he saw Sgt. William sign the 1788 deed.

Well, genealogy research isn't always so easy, is it? See Appendix A for my struggles trying to find these records. With a little help from other kind people involved in history and genealogy, I was able to locate the deeds for #1-#3.⁸ In the mean time, it's interesting to note that Sgt. William Gillespie – who was of the precinct of Montgomery, Ulster, New York in 1788 – sold his rights to his bounty land before it was even issued in 1790. Indeed, p. 161 of the ballot book⁹ shows that William Vredenburgh is the one who took delivery of William Gilaspee's Lot #39. As soon as Vredenburgh took possession of the property, he sold it to John Carpenter of Goshen, NY on 28 August 1790.

As an aside, here is a very [interesting account](#) of Vredenburgh. (search for "bounty" to get right to the good stuff). This really explains why Vredenburgh's name is all over the Cayuga deeds.

Re the claim that Jacob Bookstaver appeared in an Ulster court in December 1815, that's a bit difficult to confirm because I can't tell which court (Common pleas? General sessions? Other?), and even if I were to guess at which court, those records are not indexed.¹⁰ Until we find this record, we must take the word of our new source, which is that 25 years after Sgt. William sold his rights to Marcellus #39,

7 John McKinstry is a name that can be found in the estate papers of Matthew Gillespie who died in 1797. His connection to the Gillespie family may have more significance than we realize; more investigation is required.

8 Cayuga County, Book FA-260-61.

9 The Balloting Book and Other Documents relating to Military Bounty Lands in the state of NY, Albany, 1825.

10 There's also the question of why Bookstaver was in Ulster county court. In 1815, Montgomery was part of Orange County, but that might not be the point. In terms of research, I think we'd still have to consider both Ulster and Orange counties when looking for this court record.

Bookstaver testified that Sgt. William served for 7 years with the 1st Regiment (NY), and Bookstaver saw Sgt. William sign the deed to Lot #39 in 1788.

Revolution Service

Sgt. William's Revolutionary service is described in [Part 2](#) and [Part 3](#) below; my research appears in red.

- NY 1st Regiment, NYR,¹¹ p 17; service under Capt. Henry Tiebout, 5th company, Sgt, Aug-Dec 1780, and 1781-1783 (enlistment for duration of the war); only location mentioned was West Point in 1781
- NY 3rd Regiment, NYR, p 40; nearly constant service under Capt. James Gregg 1779 and 1780; started as Corporal, later Sgt. Note that James Gillespy in this regiment served under a different captain (Denton)
- 4th Regiment of Ulster County Militia (not sure source)
- 1st Regiment of Artillery and Dragoons (Connecticut), enlisting 20 March 1777, in 1779 stationed in Durham, CT; Unit was called Col. Sheldon's Light Dragoons, wintered generally in CT, Sgt. William was listed as a farmer from Wethersfield. His enlistment and term of service was not noted in this source; maybe for the duration of the war?¹²
- Dutchess County Militia after other units disbanded in June 1783.

Sgt. William's overall service is described as seven years, and his time in the Connecticut unit was described as three years, perhaps more.

Another important source of information about Sgt. William's military services is the pension application made by Mary Holcomb Gillespie and later Walter Gillespie after Sgt. William's death in 1802. We learn from that application that:¹³

- William [Galaspy] appears on a pay roll of Captain Theodore Woodbridge's Company in General Wooster's Provisional Regiment (Nov 1775 – Feb 1776).[3]
- March 1777: William enlisted in Colonel Sheldon's Second Continental Light Dragoons. He served under Epaprus Bull and John Shethar in the Fifth Troop, having first the rank of private (1777), then corporal (1779), and later sergeant (1780).[4]
- 1780: During the winter of 1780, William was quartered in Windsor, CT, where he met Mary Holcombe, daughter of Martin HOLCOMBE and Christian WINCHELL. William was discharged in November 1780 and joined the crew of Connecticut privateer *Young Cromwell*. [5]
- Nov 23, 1781: The *Young Cromwell* was captured by the British frigate *Amphion*. William spent the next ten months aboard the *Jersey*[6], a notorious British prison ship from which approximately 11,500 American prisoners never escaped.[7] Two days later, William and Mary Holcomb's first child, Mary, was born.
- May 31, 1782: Still a prisoner, William wrote a letter on behalf of Cyprian Barnard to Ebenezer Barnard, Cyprian's brother. Cyprian was a fellow prisoner who was in poor health, too sick and weak to write.[8]
- Aug 5, 1782: William was released to New London in a general prisoner exchange.

11 [New York in the Revolution](#)

12 [Record of service of Connecticut men](#) in the I. War of the Revolution, II. War of 1812, III. Mexican War, by Connecticut, Adjutant-General's Office; ed Henry P Johnston, Hartford, 1889; p. 278

13 William Gillispie 1752-1803, [Biography](#), wikitree, managed by James Gillespie; access 4 December 2019; many thanks!

Conclusions

I think it's clear from the review of Revolutionary service records that there were two men named William Gillespie who were Sergeants during the Revolution – one presumably lived in New York, and the other presumably lived in Connecticut. The Sgt. William Gillespie listed in this recent source, 1752-1802, was not the same person who received bounty land in Marcellus. Not only was NY service never mentioned in the pension application of the man who served in CT, but, to my knowing, the bounty lands in the [Central New York Military Tract](#) were only for soldiers who served for New York.

It also seems clear from the evidence cited that Sgt. William Gillaspoy of the 1st NY Regiment was the administrator for the fallen James Gillespy of the 4th NY Regiment, and both Gillespy's were granted bounty lands in Marcellus. So what do we know of these Marcellus Gillespy's?

- Sgt. William Gillespy sold his bounty land, Marcellus Lot #39, before it was even delivered in 1790. He sold it to a John McKinstry, whose name appears elsewhere in the story of other Ulster/Orange Gillespie's.
- C. C. Schoonmaker, for Wm. Gillespy, administrator, took delivery of James Gillespie's bounty land in 1790.
- In 1795 and 1798, four of five heirs of James sold their interest in Marcellus Lot #34.
- By 1799, David Gillespie, presumably the fifth heir, moved to the remaining acreage of Marcellus Lot #34.

So it continues to appear that William who was administrator for James' estate was not himself an heir of that estate. How then was he related, as I think we must presume that he was? I continue to think that he was probably a first cousin to James, but the exact structure of this family group is still being researched.

A question remains for me about how William Gillespy of Shawangunk, presumably the same person as Sgt. William Gillespy who received bounty land in Marcellus, came to serve in the NY 1st Regiment. If indeed he served for seven years (which is not clear from the records we've found so far), then was he in Albany county when he joined that Regiment? I tend to think that this Sgt. William started out in the 3rd Regiment:

The 3rd New York Regiment was authorized under Colonel James Clinton on June 28, 1775 for five months service in Canada. The regiment was re-raised between February 1776 and May 1776 at Albany, New York for service with the Continental Army under Colonel Rudolphus Ritzema. The regiment was raised for the third time in December, 1776 under the command of Peter Gansevoort.

The regiment would see action in the New York Campaign, Fort Stanwix and the Sullivan Expedition. During the winter of 1779 - 1780 it encamped with the New York Brigade at Morristown, New Jersey. The regiment was merged into the 1st New York Regiment, on January 1, 1781.

Finally, I have assumed that William Gillespie who was enumerated in Shawangunk in 1790 was the same person who administered the estate of James who died in 1780. I don't see any reason to change that assumption based on this new evidence. The only difference is that we now might say it was Sgt. William Gillespie of the 1st NY Regiment who was residing in Shawangunk in 1790.

There is so much we don't know, and so much yet to learn.

Appendix A. Dealing with Early Cayuga County Deeds

The township of Marcellus is today located in the county of Onondaga. But in which county was Marcellus when the bounty lands were delivered (July 1790)? Here is a brief explanation of the moving county lines:¹⁴

When bounty land lots within the Military Tract of Central NY were first designated and awarded to eligible Revolutionary War soldiers or their heirs & assignees, I think the area was perhaps part of Montgomery County NY. Ontario was taken off from Montgomery County in 1789 and Herkimer, Otsego and Tioga Counties in 1791. Onondaga County was formed from Herkimer County in 1794 and Cayuga County NY was formed from Onondaga County in 1799.

Confusing, right? I'm still not sure which county claimed Marcellus in 1790. So having to start somewhere, I turned to the land records found at the familysearch catalog, consulting both Onondaga and Cayuga counties. The digitized indexes for each county contain different references, most especially for the early deeds, which are the ones I want. In addition, the Onondaga indexes point to volumes like ICR or ICF, but no such volumes exist on the familysearch site. Familysearch does have this note on the Cayuga deeds (why not on the Onondaga deeds where the reference is found, I have no idea):

ICF -- refers to deeds recorded in Cayuga County before 1799. These deeds refer to lands that were given to the soldiers after the Revolution as payment for their services to their country and now are being sold for money or other valuable consideration. DP -- means Decrees to Partitions (1810-1877). The lands were partitioned according to an act of the legislature of the state of New York and passed in 1801.

But even this ICF volume label is misleading. I *think* that the upper-case "i" is really a numeral one. I saw another early reference in the indexes to CR-2, so that made me realize the "I" was probably a numeral. What is this volume and where is it?? Time to ask for help.

Here are the steps I have followed to get to the early deeds I found in the Onondaga County deed index:

- Thrash around trying to get past my denial that the early deeds I want do not exist on the familysearch site.
- Consult this fabulous website: <https://www.cayugagenealogy.org/land/index.html> and read the article "Finding Early Deeds in the Cayuga County NY Clerk's Office".
- Still feel confused and write to the author of said article, Mr. Bernie Corcoran. His patient reply was filled with information, but he was ultimately unfamiliar with the volumes I was looking for. He did, however, ask me specifically who I was looking for, so I told him.
- Mr. Corcoran then consulted this index on the FamilySearch website: 'Cayuga County NY Land Records Grantor Index 1794-1836 Volume 1 AA XX'
- In said index, we were able to locate three of the four deeds I am looking for, and naturally they have an entirely different volume reference: F.A. This is also a volume not on the familysearch website.
- Contact the Cayuga County Records Retention Office at email address: ccrecords@cayugacounty.us . The very friendly staff told me it would cost \$3.50 to copy and send the deed pages I want. Done.

¹⁴ Explanation provided by Bernie Corcoran of the Cayuga County NYGenWeb Project. Many thanks!