

THE GILBERTSVILLE/GREENE/SMITHVILLE CONNECTION

Peg Ross, Greene Town Historian

Finding one's ancestors is a very popular pastime for many. A workshop on Ancestry.com was given at the library last week for patrons who wish to use this website to do research on family histories. A man from California was in town recently trying to find the connection between his Burroughs ancestor and the famous author and naturalist, John Burroughs, who lived in Roxbury, New York. He found the missing link right here in Greene! A woman from Worcester has found out that her grandson's ancestors, the McMorans, had a knife factory here and she's coming to see the knives in the Museum. Greene's Nancy Bromley discovered a marvelous photograph of her great-great grandfather as she was looking through a scrapbook donated to the Greene Historical Society by Shirley Copeland Strassenburgh. The genealogical materials at the Moore Memorial Library and Museum may help you trace your own family!

I am from Gilbertsville and through the years of living here in Greene, I have met and heard of many residents who have either moved from Gilbertsville or have relatives living there. Dot and Oscar Swenson, a well-known Greene couple, both had ties to Gilbertsville. Oscar was the editor of The Chenango American newspaper for many years and before that he was the editor of the Otsego Journal in Gilbertsville. His wife, Dorothy Musson Swenson, was a descendant of William Musson, the first merchant in Gilbertsville. I became interested in others with a Gilbertsville connection, and discovered that there were and are other Greene residents who are direct descendants of the founder of Gilbertsville, Abijah Gilbert.

Abijah Gilbert bought 1,000 acres from Lewis and Richard Morris in Otsego County in 1787. In the following years, three of his siblings came to live in the area of Gilbertsville and three of their children, William and John Winter, and John Gilbert Lucas, came to Greene and Smithville to settle.

William and John Winter were brothers who ran a tannery on Birdsall Creek, where the Barnes home now stands on North Chenango Street. William acquired it in 1815 and they ran it for several years (it was still running in 1835) before it went out of business. Later William is listed as a farmer and lived on the Genegantslet Road.

John's life in Greene had to have been sad. While preparing a North Canal cemetery tour for school children, Nancy Bromley discovered a tombstone with the following names and dates for John Winter's children:

Hannah d. May 23, 1831 1 yr. 7 months
John Henry d. March 11, 1833 7 months
Clarissa d. Apr. 3, 1836 1 month 21 days
John Henry d. Jan. 11, 1843 6 months

One can only surmise why their four children died as infants. His family left Greene sometime after 1843 and I found them in the 1850 census living in Wisconsin. John is listed as a farmer. There were three living daughters:

Hannah 16 years old (born in 1834)
Clarissa 13 years old (born in 1837)
Rhoda 11 years old (born in 1839)
Nothing more is known about them.

William Winter stayed in Greene and had thirteen children. Many remember the Winter and Owens department store east of Citizens Bank. The Winter part of the business was William T. Winter, a grandson. His daughter, Gertrude, married Horace Owens and Katherine Owens Pollard was their daughter. This is just to name one descendant of the Gilbert family whose grandfather was a well-known business man in Greene for many years. I am certain that there are other descendants who still live in Greene.

John Gilbert Lucas came to Smithville in 1839 and settled on top of Bottle Hill on the other side of the Bottle Farm. He had ten children, one of whom is the great grandfather of Frances Hallenbeck Davis. Frances remembers her grandmother, Martha Gilbert Lucas, telling her stories about visiting the Lucas relatives on top of Bottle Hill. Three of the younger Lucases never married and as a child, Frances's grandmother had to behave decorously and not move a muscle in the parlor in fear of disturbing the prim-and-proper relatives. Elsie Bottle Churchsmith said she always heard that the Lucases knew lots about herbal medicine and that the maiden sisters often helped with births in the area.

Another one of this Lucas family, Samuel, was the grandfather of Christina Pate who taught many years in Greene district schools. Ernie White says that everything he knows he learned from Christina Pate. In later life, she married a man from Gilbertsville, Will Woodland, who built the Major's Inn, a former home of the Gilbert family. When I was growing up, I knew her as Mrs. Woodland and never knew she was from Greene.

This past summer three Gilbert descendants from Gilbertsville, Mary Hill Gilbert Harris, her sister Katharine Gilbert Lidz and Valerie Elbrick Hanlon, came to Greene to visit Frances Davis. They had never met but the connection was there. They are fifth cousins and had an enjoyable time together.

And so the circle of life continues. We don't have to go back too far before we're all related. Within eight great-great grandfathers it's fairly certain everyone will have some sort of connection to each other. It probably is true that we all are descended from royalty! Have fun finding a fifth cousin and just maybe there will be a king or queen lurking about in your heritage.



Mary Hill Gilbert Harris, Frances Hallenbeck Davis, Katharine Gilbert Lidz