

SAMUEL EDWARD GILLESPIE AND EDITH KELLY

On October 2, 1838, **Samuel Edward Gillespie (1815–1863)** married **Edith Kelly (1818–1898)** in Blount County, northeast of Birmingham, Alabama. He was twenty-three years old, and she was twenty years old.

Gillespie is an old Irish and Scottish surname. In Ireland the name is usually associated with the Protestant Ulster Scots of Northern Ireland. Neville's Gillespie heritage¹ is not deeply recorded, and there is little documentation for the ancestors of Samuel Edward Gillespie. Research is also difficult because there were so many Gillespies, all repeating the same forenames, living in North and South Carolina in the late eighteenth century.

Samuel Edward Gillespie was born in Abbeville County, South Carolina, on March 18, 1815. Before 1838 he migrated to northern Alabama, where he married and was listed as having one daughter and living in Birmingham in 1840. By 1845 Samuel Edward Gillespie had moved to Hernando, DeSoto County, Mississippi, just south of Memphis, Tennessee. In the 1850 census, he and his wife, Edith, were recorded in Hernando, along with four daughters and one son. Hernando is a place where many Gillespie family members lived, off and on, during the nineteenth century.

In 1854 Samuel Edward Gillespie and his family moved westward across the Mississippi River to Jefferson County, Arkansas, whose county seat is in Pine Bluff. Jefferson County is about 175 miles southwest of Hernando. On June 1, 1859, Samuel Gillespie received a land patent from the government for forty acres in Jefferson County. We have a copy of that land patent, which bears the signature of President James Buchanan (1791–1868). The document was signed by the president's secretary. In the 1860 census, Samuel Gillespie is listed as a forty-five-year-old farmer residing in Whiteville Township, a rural area near Pine Bluff.

Samuel Edward and Edith Kelly Gillespie had nine children over a period of sixteen years. Tragically, all of them died young except one, Neville's great-grandfather **John Cornelius Gillespie (1843–1907)**.² Samuel Edward Gillespie died at his home in Arkansas on March 27, 1863, just nine days after his forty-eighth birthday. He left his wife, Edith, with four living children, the oldest of whom was John Cornelius Gillespie. At the time of Samuel Edward Gillespie's death, John Cornelius Gillespie was a Confederate soldier stationed at Port Hudson in Louisiana.

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Edith Kelly was born in Blount County, Alabama, just north of Birmingham, on April 14, 1818. She was forty-four years old when she was widowed in 1863. Within the next year, her son John Cornelius Gillespie married, and within the next four years, her other three children were dead. Thus, by age forty-nine, Edith Kelly Gillespie had lost her husband and eight of her nine children.

Edith Kelly Gillespie remarried Henry H. Julian (1826–), who was from Water Valley, Mississippi, about sixty miles south of Hernando. Interestingly, we have a picture of him from about 1870, around the time that they married, when he would have been forty-four years old and she would have been around fifty-two years old. They lived in Hernando.

Edith Kelly Gillespie Julian died at age eighty, on July 17, 1898, in Toledo, Ohio. We have no record of why she was in Ohio; perhaps she and her husband had moved there later in life.

Henry H. Julian, the second husband of Edith Kelly Gillespie and the stepfather of John Cornelius Gillespie, Neville's great-grandfather.





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1. GILLESPIE HERITAGE

Samuel E. Gillespie (1815–1863)	m. 1838	Edith Kelly (1818–1898)
John C. Gillespie (1843–1907)	m. 1879	Sarah A. Mackey (1857–1911)
Ola F. Gillespie (1881–1934)	m. 1904	Stanley Neville Purifoy (1879–1942)
Margaret Purifoy (1908–1973)	m. 1931	Charles D. Frierson Jr. (1907–1970)

The name Gillespie originated in Scotland, where it is recorded as early as the twelfth century among the Celtic people of the Scottish Highlands. The name derives from a combination of Gaelic* words that means “servant of the bishop.”

In the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Gillespie families in Scotland were strongly Calvinistic** in their religious convictions. In the late seventeenth century, the Gillespies removed to Ireland, where a James Gillespie (1660–1700)*** fought with the Protestants in 1690 at the important Battle of the Boyne.****

Neville’s Scotch-Irish Gillespie forebears likely moved from Scotland to Ireland around 1670. They immigrated to America in the early eighteenth century and most likely lived in the backcountry of the Carolinas in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

We are not able to clearly document the Gillespie ancestry prior to **Samuel Edward Gillespie (1815–1863)**, who was born in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, in 1815. He married **Edith Kelly (1818–1898)** in 1838 in Alabama and sired **John Cornelius Gillespie (1843–1907)** in Alabama in 1843.

We do, however, have a photograph that presumably depicts the father of Samuel Edward Gillespie. Written on the photograph are these words: “*James Gillespie and his great grandson Eddie Gillespie—approx 1869.*” If the words written on this photograph are correct, this James Gillespie is the father of Samuel Edward Gillespie. The identification might, however, be incorrect.

*Gaelic or Gallic is an adjective that refers to Gaul, a mid-European region roughly occupied by France today. Gaul was inhabited mostly by tribes of Celtic people. The Celts came to Britain around 500 BCE.

**Calvinistic is an adjective used to describe followers of the French theologian John Calvin (1509–1564), who had a great influence on the founding of the Presbyterian Church, also called the Church of Scotland.

***This James Gillespie was born in Scotland and died in Ireland. We have no evidence that he is a direct ancestor.

****The Battle of the Boyne was fought on July 1, 1690, at the Boyne River in County Meath, located just northwest of Dublin, Ireland. William III (William of Orange), the Protestant king of England, defeated the Catholic King James II of England, who had been overthrown in 1688. That religious war continued for over three hundred years.



A photograph upon which is written “James Gillespie and his great-grandson Eddie Gillespie—approx 1869” and “Ola and Edith Gillespie’s great-grandfather and half brother Eddie.” The young boy is James Edward Gillespie, the two- or three-year-old son of John Cornelius Gillespie. The young boy died at age eleven of yellow fever in 1878. The old man is either James Gillespie, the father of Samuel Edward Gillespie, or George Gillespie, with whom James Edward Gillespie is enumerated in the Federal census of 1870.

There is an 1870 census record that casts some doubt on the identification of the elderly man in the photograph. The October 1, 1870, Federal census in Hernando, Mississippi, lists twenty-seven-year-old John Cornelius Gillespie, (a brick mason), and his three-year-old son, **James Edward “Eddie” Gillespie (1867–1878)**, as living in Hernando in the household of seventy-two-year-old George Gillespie (1798–after 1870). Since they were all living together at about the same time the photograph was taken, the elderly man in the photograph could be George Gillespie.

Because of this census entry, one genealogical website lists George Gillespie as the father of Samuel Edward Gillespie, and thus a grandfather of John Cornelius Gillespie. I think it is more likely that George Gillespie was an uncle or great-uncle of John Cornelius Gillespie.

16	87	87	Gillespie George	72	W	Married											1	16
17			Harriet	38	F	W	Housekeeping											17
18			John C.	27	M	W	Brick Mason											18
19			James E.	3	M	W												19

The 1870 census entry for the household of George Gillespie in Hernando, Mississippi.

It is a worthy challenge for future generations to deepen this Gillespie heritage.



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**2. THE NINE CHILDREN OF SAMUEL EDWARD GILLESPIE AND EDITH KELLY:
 A STORY OF CHILDHOOD MORTALITY**

Neville's great-great-grandfather **Samuel Edward Gillespie (1815–1863)** and his wife, **Edith Kelly (1818–1898)**, had nine children born between 1839 and 1857. They experienced a staggeringly high rate of death among their children.

- **NANCY J. GILLESPIE (1839–1848)** was born on August 20, 1839, in Blount County, Alabama, and died on November 18, 1848, in DeSoto County, Mississippi, at age nine.
- **MARY L. GILLESPIE (1841–1864)** was born on July 12, 1841, in Jefferson County, Alabama, and died on January 26, 1864, in Jefferson County, Arkansas, at age twenty-two.
- **JOHN CORNELIUS GILLESPIE (1843–1907)** was born on April 25, 1843, in Jefferson County, Alabama, and died on October 31, 1907, in Craighead County, Arkansas, at age sixty-four.
- **MARGARET A. GILLESPIE (1845–1855)** was born on July 15, 1845, in DeSoto County, Mississippi, and died on July 4, 1855, in Jefferson County, Arkansas, at age nine.
- **AMANDA E. GILLESPIE (1847–1855)** was born on October 5, 1847, in DeSoto County and died on June 18, 1855, in Jefferson County, Arkansas, at age seven.
- **ELIZABETH C. GILLESPIE (1850–1852)** was born on June 27, 1850, in DeSoto County and died on September 18, 1852, in DeSoto County at age two.
- **SUSAN E. GILLESPIE (1852–1857)** was born on September 13, 1852, in DeSoto County and died on August 7, 1857, in Jefferson County, Arkansas, at age four.
- **SARAH M. GILLESPIE (1854–1863)** was born on September 24, 1854, in Jefferson County, Arkansas, and died on July 21, 1863, in Jefferson County, Arkansas, at age eight.
- **SAMUEL H. GILLESPIE (1857–1867)** was born on June 27, 1857, in Jefferson County, Arkansas, and died on August 31, 1867, probably in Jefferson County, Arkansas, at age ten.

Samuel Edward and Edith Kelly Gillespie essentially had a child every two years from 1839 to 1857, a period of eighteen years. All of these children died young, except John Cornelius Gillespie, Neville's great-grandfather.

In the mid-nineteenth century, childhood mortality was very high. Medical science had not yet adequately learned about germs and bacteria, so infectious diseases—such as typhoid, scarlet fever, tuberculosis, pneumonia, diphtheria, and malaria—made life precarious for young people.

The data that I have seen suggest that, in the nineteenth century, as many as thirty percent of children in the United States and Europe died before they reached the age of fourteen. As awful as that was, childhood mortality rates were much worse in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England and Northern Europe; about sixty percent of children at that time died before they reached the age of sixteen.

Today less than one-tenth of one percent of children in the United States and Europe die before they reach their mid-teens. Sanitation, vaccinations, and antibiotics have made an enormous difference in childhood mortality.