

Daniel R. Bigelow House
918 East Glass Avenue
Olympia
Thurston County
Washington

HABS No. WA-161

HABS
WASH
34-OLYMPIA
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Western Region National Park Service
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California 94102

HABS
WASH.
34-OLYM,
2-

DANIEL R. BIGELOW HOUSE

Location: 918 East Glass Avenue
Olympia, Thurston County, Washington

Date of Construction: 1854

Present Owner: Daniel S. Bigelow
918 East Glass Avenue
Olympia, Washington 98506

Present Use: Private Residence

Significance: The significance of the Bigelow House rests on its architecture, construction, and most importantly, on its association with Daniel R. Bigelow, pioneer lawyer and member of the first legislature of Washington Territory.

The house is one of the oldest buildings remaining in Olympia. Its Gothic Revival Style, reflected in the ornate gable bargeboards, was common at the time this house was built, but there are few remaining in the Olympia area. A significant structural feature of the house is its unusual foundation. It rests on cedar logs that float like a raft directly on the earth.

Daniel R. Bigelow was a very important figure in the development of Olympia and Washington Territory. He was a graduate of Harvard Law School, a lawyer, and an early defender of human rights. In 1853, he helped rewrite the laws of Oregon Territory. He held numerous public offices on the local and county levels as well as serving in the first legislature of Washington Territory where he was among those responsible for women voting in 1884 and 1886.

Historians: James H. Vandermeer (1979)
Stephen A. Mathison (1984)

Daniel Richardson Bigelow (1824-1905) was born in Belleville, New York, in 1824. He attended Union College at Schenectady, New York, and graduated from Harvard Law School in 1849. After a short period of practicing law at Belleville, he joined a wagon train and crossed the continent to Portland, Oregon, in 1850. The following year he sailed the schooner "Exact" to Puget Sound, arriving at Smithfield (Olympia) on November 15, 1851, and built an office the same month. The young lawyer also took out a 350 acre donation land claim for a farm.

On June 18, 1854, he married Elizabeth White, the first school teacher in the area, by whom he had eight children. The present Bigelow House was constructed during the summer of 1854 following this marriage.

Bigelow quickly became a leading citizen, not only of Olympia, but of the entire Pacific Northwest. In 1852 he was elected Treasurer of the newly created Thurston County and later served as Justice of the Peace, Auditor, and Prosecuting Attorney.

He spent the summer of 1853 in Salem, Oregon, as one of three commissioners who completely rewrote the laws of Oregon Territory. Their recommendations were accepted by the Legislative Assembly and enacted into law. This reflects the prestige Bigelow had already achieved by 1853 in legal and political affairs. His name frequently turns up in the records of the Oregon Archives Division. This source shows, for example, that Beglow was a petitioner for matters related to the definition of the boundaries of Thurston County and the establishment of Olympia as county seat. They also document his role in the George Bush affair.

George Bush was the son of a black seaman from the British Indies and a white woman. To escape pre-Civil War racial bigotry in Missouri, Bush joined his neighbor, Michael Simmons, in migrating to the Northwest. The party

arrived at the southern end of Puget Sound in 1845 and was the first to settle the area. Bush's farm prospered; he was generous to newcomers and became popular. However, the laws of Oregon Territory, of which the Puget Sound country was a part until 1853, forbade ownership of land to "persons of African descent," and this provision was used in an attempt to invalidate Bush's claim. Daniel Bigelow was a prominent defender of Bush's claim, and in the first legislature of the newly created Washington Territory, Bigelow, who represented Thurston County, presented a petition which asked the legislature to memorialize Congress to approve Bush's claim. The 1854 legislature approved, as did Congress. Bigelow thus played a key role in an important chapter of black history.

Bigelow's public service as a legislator began in 1854 as a member of the upper house of the first legislature of Washington Territory. He served several additional terms and outlived all other members of the first legislature. In addition to his role in the Bush affair, Bigelow championed temperance and women's suffrage. He was among those responsible for women voting in Washington in 1884 and 1886. Women did not again obtain the right to vote in Washington until 1910.

Bigelow was also keenly interested in education. He was elected Superintendent of the Olympia School in November of 1853 and was president of the Board of Trustees of the Puget Sound Wesleyan Institute. This Methodist institution began in 1856 as Puget Sound Institute and was reorganized in 1857. Although it soon ceased operations because of a lack of funds, it represented the beginnings of higher education in the Puget Sound region.

The Daniel R. Bigelow House is located on the east side of Budd Inlet, an arm of Puget Sound. The terrain slopes gently down to the water's edge. The other houses in the neighborhood vary in age from turn of the century to recent, and most are modest with small yards. Compared to the surrounding buildings, the Bigelow House is striking for its large size and the spacious grounds around it.

The address of the house is on Glass Avenue, a narrow lane which meets the banks of Budd Inlet about four hundred feet to the west. Enclosed by an ornate iron fence, the yard is notable for its sweeping lawn and two huge holly trees between the house and Glass Avenue. The Bigelow House has a cruciform floorplan, with the longer axis, which is parallel to Glass Avenue, running east and west.

Two stories in height, the house has a steeply pitched roof with strong gable ends on all facades. The siding is narrow clapboards. Fenestration is generally six-over-six double-hung windows flanked by shutters. There are three porches on the west facade, each with an entrance. Above the central porch is a large balcony with a lancet arch over the paneglass door. This element and the decorative work on the eaves identify the style of the Bigelow House as Gothic Revival. There is another porch and entrance on the north facade. The structure has been superficially altered by removal of some exterior elements, but its original massing remains intact.

One highly unusual architectural element is the foundation. The house rests on a "raft" of cedar logs. This feature, which is hidden by skirting, was discovered by the owner when plumbing repairs were made. The logs rest on bare earth with no apparent deterioration in the 125 year history of the house. They are huge, being at least two feet in diameter. The subflooring of the house is nailed to the logs.

Originally the house contained seven large rooms measuring 15 by 15½ feet with 10½ foot ceilings. Several partitions have been added over the years, increasing the number of rooms. There were originally seven fireplaces, one for each room; now three fireplaces remain.

The Bigelow House is still furnished with much of its original owner's belongings, many of which were brought around the Horn on sailing ships in the 1850's and 1860's. Included among these items are a square Steinway piano, a reed organ, several davenports, settees, and many chairs and tables. Still used as a residence, the house is maintained in good condition by the direct descendants of the original owner.

The combination stable and woodshed, located to the north of the house, is still standing. It is a two story rectangular structure with a gable roof and plain board siding. It was built earlier than the main house and was used as a residence while the house was being constructed. This building is now used as an art studio by the present Mrs. Bigelow and for storage of farm implements and other articles acquired over the long history of these structures.

This report is based on a National Register Nomination prepared in 1979 by James H. Vandermeer, Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS:

- Bancroft, Huhert H. History of Washington, Idaho and Montana 1845-1890, (San Francisco, 1890), pp. 55, 73, 78, 85, 375. (R.D. Bigelow is also mentioned in the index as Daniel B.).
- Berto, Harold E., and Catharine Bullard. History of the State of Washington, (Boston, 1947), p. 106.
- Denny, Arthur A. Pioneer Days on Puget Sound, (Seattle, 1908), pp. 43, 72).
- Hunt, Herbert, and Floyd C. Kaylor. Washington, West of the Cascades, (2 Vol. Tacoma, 1917), Vol. 1, pp. 115, 134.
- McDonald, Lucile. Where The Washingtonians Lived, (Seattle, 1969), pp. 66-68.
- Meany, Edmond S. History of the State of Washington, (New York, 1909), pp. 155-156, 164.
- Newell, Gordon. Rogues, Buffoons & Statesmen, (Seattle, 1975), pp. 9-10, 17-19, 56.
- Snowden, Clington A. History of Washington, (5 Vol. New York, 1909), Vol. 3, pp. 111, 167, 202, 230.
- U.S. Works Progress Administration. Told by the Pioneers, Reminiscences of Pioneer Life, (Washington Pioneer Project, School and Library edition, 1937-38, 3 Vol. in one), Vol. 3, p. 199.

NEWSPAPERS:

- Lacey, Washington, Leader, (Decemher 10, 1970).
- Olympia, Washington, Olympian, (August 31, 1962, December 20, 1973, June 1, 1975, January 26, 1979).
- Tacoma, Washington, News Trihune, (Fehruary 7, 1965).

OTHER REFERENCES:

- Archives Division, Office of the Secretary of State, State of Oregon.
- Snell, Charles W. "Special Report on the Bigelow House in Olympia, Washington," National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, (San Francisco, 1965).
- Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Daniel S. Bigelow conducted on March 15, 1979, by J.H. Vandermeer.