

8-17-1978

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D'Arienzo, Daria, "Elizabeth Bigelow" (1978). *Middletown Papers*. Paper 27.
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Elizabeth Bigelow

Daria D'Arienzo
Intro. to Family and Com. History
Professor Hall
August 17, 1978

[Title page has been edited at the request of the author.]

Elizabeth Bigelow or Ah! the life of a Detective.

This paper is simply an attempt to present the potpourri of Bigelow family information extracted from various sources. It does not pretend to be complete or even the presentation of a complete idea. Because of the lack of time, I have found it impossible to pursue various "leads" into the Bigelow family. Nevertheless, the exercise has been a rewarding one.

When I chose Elizabeth Bigelow I originally thought I would be exploring the life ^{of a member} of the lower rank of 18th century Middletown society. Since most women were the wives of farmers, I was not exploring a representative figure. However, she was not unlike many colonial women who took over their husband's business when they died. She became the proprietress of her husband's tavern for thirty years: from 1776 until at least the beginning of the 19th century.

Information about Elizabeth and the Middletown Bigelow clan was difficult find. The basic reason for this seemed to be that the (most) of Bigelows died out or left town. Only one male survived and after 1816 he seemed to have disappeared. At this point, I could find no death notice, however it seems likely that he passed away.

From the Revolution until the beginning of the 19th century, Middletown was developing into a commercial urban center. Trade, both foreign and coastal, was important. More people were moving into the city area. In a seaport town, inns and taverns provided food and lodging for travelers. When the stagecoach route developed inns and taverns offered

facilities for overland travelers as well.

Bigelow's Tavern provided these services and more. Although there were other taverns in Middletown, Bigelow's seemed to be a popular place. It was the official stagecoach stop in Middletown on the route between Hartford and New Haven.¹ Mail moved from Bigelow's.² In addition, the tavern was a meeting place ; the community gathering place of the 18th/19th centuries.

Bigelow's was also used for general public purposes. The Connecticut Courant, for a period of more than 20 years, has advertisements for public meetings to be held at Bigelow's. They included the distribution of estates in auction form ; ³ *the use of* using the tavern as a central location of goods for the distribution of debt payments;⁴ the public sale of grain;⁵ the sale of ships masts and spars;⁶ and the sale of land lots.⁷ Woodford, Vermont land proprietors used Bigelow's for their meetings.⁸ It became a place for people to inquire about a ship's passage or cargo.⁹ The tavern was also a lost and found,¹⁰ ^{as well as} a place of entertainment and good cheer.

If nothing else, the ²⁰ *advertisements* show that taverns played an important part in the social and commercial lives of the people. This seems to be a direct change from the beginning of the 18th century ^{when} Middletown had no "inns of note."¹¹ The meetinghouse was the stopping place. This is noteworthy since it suggests the growing secularization of the people during the 18th century, and the declining importance of religion and its trappings. That Middletown should have at least four taverns by the Revolution ,

and by all indications, they were well frequented, is significant.

Bigelow's seems to have had a good reputation. One advertisement announced an auction "at the dwellinghouse of Mr. Timothy Bigelow innholder in said Middletown, where gentlemen of taste will *do* well to attend."¹² The type of people who used Bigelow's tavern is interesting. There are two indications that George Washington stopped at the tavern on his visit throughout New England.¹³ In addition, Thomas Jefferson lets us know that he and James Madison were at Mrs. Bigelow's more than once; on June 8, 1791 and June 10, 1791. According to Jefferson, they "breakfasted and dined"¹⁴ there. The suggestion of another important "guest" can be gleaned from a receipt for £22-12-7, from Elizabeth Bigelow, dated October, 19, 1781, to Governor William Franklin of New Jersey for some money paid to her by a Reverend Joseph Perry.¹⁵ *of East Windsor.* (It seems that in 1776, William Franklin was arrested because he refused to resign from his royal governorship. In July he was taken to Connecticut and spent two years on parole or in confinement in the Litchfield jail.¹⁶ As far as one can tell, perhaps he was under house arrest and put up at Bigelow's tavern.¹⁷ This is an interesting use of a tavern.)

At this point, I'm not quite sure how the tavern began, however it appears to have been successful. It also seems that the Bigelows had more *property* money value than the average artisan/^{or} small shopkeeper. Wills and estate inventories (etc.), show this. Land seemed to be their biggest asset. This came from Timothy Bigelow's father.

Timothy's father was one Samuel Bigelow. He was baptized

at the First Church of Hartford in 1695 and went off to Southampton, Long Island to seek his fortune. Here he married one Mehitabel (Halsey) (Taylor) (Spencer). At this point his profession is thought to be that of a ship's carpenter. In 1723, while still on Long Island, he bought 350 acres of land in Middletown, Connecticut. From Long Island, he sold some land in 1731 and 1733. By 1738, he appears to be a resident of Middletown.¹⁸ In his will, dated, 14 October 1748, he refers to himself as "Doctor." However the inventory of his estate doesn't seem to indicate an association with the medical profession. As a ships carpenter Samuel was a part of the artisan group and the tools listed indicate that he had a trade. But his total estate of £3023-2-2 old tenor, shows a fairly well-off man. Furniture, debts owed to him, land and a homelot worth £2150- account for most of his wealth.¹⁹

Samuel left all of ^{his personal property} ~~this~~ to his wife ^(who was also his) ~~as~~ executrix and ~~had~~ the land ^(divided) equally among his three sons. Unfortunately, Mehitabel did not live much longer. The meadow land and homelot ~~seems to~~ increased in value. She left an estate of £3780-3-8, which included silver spoons.²⁰ This is quite a bit for a ships carpenter's wife. It is clear that land was an important asset for anyone to have and substantially increased the worth of a person and hence improved their status.

According to his father's will, Timothy as oldest, recieved one third of his father's land. Although Timothy left an estate ^{worth} ~~of~~ approximately half of his father's ~~worth~~, he did not seem to fare too poorly ^{and} a tavern keeper. In terms of occupation, his "status" was perhaps better than his father's,

As the proprietor of a tavern on Main Street in Middletown, It was referred to as the "principal house of entertainment in (Middletown) and not to be behind the times in matters of tradition." ²¹ During Timothy's time and that of his wife Elizabeth, the tavern was becoming a important ^{part} of community life. Howe suggested that Timothy was a recognized figure. Howe states: Timothy was "landlord of the village tavern for many years, a large landholder and a very prominent man in the town."²²

Timothy came with his father to Middletown from Southampton, where he was born on September 19, 1724. He married Elizabeth Clark of Milford Connecticut, of September 13, 1753.²³ He was 29 and she was 28. Although both Timothy and Elizabeth were baptized in Congregational churches, their first child, Timothy Halsey (b. Jan. 26, 1755) was christened in the Church of the Holy Trinity in Middletown. This is one indication that the Bigelow's had moved away from Congregationalism.²⁴

Timothy Halsey died young. In addition, their second child, Samuel (b. Oct. 15, 1757) died within three days of ^{his b. & ch.} birth. Although I could find no record of Samuel's christening in the church records, the other children, Elizabeth (b. July 13, 1759), Sarah (b. April 6, 1766), and Samuel (b. January 7, 1768), were all christened at Trinity Church within two weeks of ^{his} birth. I ^{could} not find Timothy Halsey (b. May 14, 1763) since the records for those years are missing.

Timothy's business seemed to have gone well. After his death at 52, on April 7, 1776, his estate inventory indicates a large number of possessions. Aside from the personal clothes, his items indicate his status. He owned gold buttons and rings;

silver shoe buckles; a silver tankard and cup; 1 dozen silver tablespoons and 4 dozen teaspoons. In addition, he owned various sections of land in Chatham, Haddam and Middletown which made up the bulk of his estate worth £1397. He also owned sheep which he lent to various people. (Perhaps he was part of the experimental sheep grazing in Connecticut during the 18th century.) Timothy also had books and a share in the Library.

Items in Timothy's inventory also suggest his occupation. He had a number of beds, chairs and tables and bed linens. He had a large number of plates, both ceramic and pewter and kitchen equipment. In addition, he left 25 gallons of Maderia wine, "Jamacia Spirits", 24 gallons of Brandy, 31 gallons of Rum and various other liquors. Unless one owned a place where spirits were consumed, it is unlikely that this amount of liquor would appear in an inventory.²⁵

Although Timothy ^{does} does not leave an extremely large estate, a comparison of his estate with his brother Issac's, shows the significance. Timothy's total estate was £1480-77-1. As a member of the middle ranks of society, Timothy probably had a stable life. His brother Isaac was an unmarried seaman. He left a total estate of £16-18-1. A greatcoat and britches valued at £4-10., accounted for the largest part. It is interesting that Isaac, a seaman, had one pair of silver shoe buckles and 1 pair of silver knee buckles. It makes one wonder if he inherited them. In terms of sibling competition, Timothy held a more prominent place in society. Isaac left next to nothing.

As his wife, Elizabeth inherited his place as proprietress of Bigelow's tavern. In 1776, all her children were minors:

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Elizabeth was 15, Timothy Halsey was 13, Sarah was 10, and Samuel was 8. Elizabeth was executrix of Timothy's estate. As his wife, she gained one third of his real and personal estate and the use of the entire thing until the children became 21. The four children each received one sixth of the estate. All their settlements included land.

Elizabeth never remarried. She took over her husband's business and brought up her children as Anglicans. It was under her proprietorship that Bigelow's tavern was visited by its most famous guests. However, she doesn't seem to have run it alone. By 1790 her children were all grown. The census seems to indicate that along with three slaves, she had her families' help. It appears that most of them were living with her. It also indicates the importance of the family group in a business venture.

Howe states that Timothy Halsey Bigelow "kept for many years the old Bigelow tavern, a well known hostiery in that section of the state."²⁶ Timothy married Mary Ann Ingraham on January 7, 1789 at Trinity Church. "Captain T.H. Bigelow died "after a long and distressing illness."²⁷ The 1800 census seems to indicate that his wife and their 11 year old son John Ingraham, lived with Elizabeth Bigelow. In addition, Elizabeth's daughter Sarah lived with her until her death in 1802. (She was unmarried and her prospects need to be investigated.) Samuel, also lived with her. He was John Ingraham's guardian.

Elizabeth Bigelow's oldest daughter Elizabeth, married Captain William Henderson on June 20, 1790 at Trinity Church,

when she was thirty. It is unclear if William was a ship's captain or a military officer or if he and Timothy Halsey were acquainted. The amount of tax he paid in the 1796 and 1800 census, \$35.40 and \$25.00 respectively, show that his resources were not great. Elizabeth and William had two children: Mary Elizabeth and William Walter Henderson. Although I could find no record of Mary, William Walter was christened in a private ceremony on August 5, 1793, at Trinity Church, because he was "a sick child."²⁸ It was also the day he died, only 36 days old. He was buried by the Anglican church on August 7, 1793.

It is his name that is significant, since it may reflect the Bigelow's religious affiliations and social contacts and politics (?). William Walter was a friend and classmate from Harvard, of Samuel H. Parsons, who also had a son called William Walter Parsons. While Parsons was a patriot, William Walter was not. He was a minister of the Church of England, who chose to preach to exiles in Nova Scotia for a time during the war. He preached in Middletown while on a visit to Parsons, so he would be known to the townspeople.

Captain Henderson died "very suddenly" on July 21, 1801.³⁰ His wife Elizabeth followed shortly on August 30, 1801 "after a long and distressing illness."³¹ It is likely that Mary Henderson went to live with her grandmother Elizabeth Bigelow.

Samuel lived with his mother for his entire life. ~~Adir~~ through the 1790's and early 1800's in the Middlesex Gazette suggest that Samuel tried to set up in trade as well as help his mother with the tavern. Most of what he was selling was rum or other spirits and salt. He also ^{carried on} ~~transacted~~ the insurance

business for William Witmore Esq. of Boston.³²

It becomes clear that unlike his father, Samuel was not successful. In October, 1805 Samuel issued a notice of bankruptcy petition.³³ On July 4, 1806 he issued a notice of the meeting of his creditors to distribute his estate.³⁴ During the early 1790's Samuel seemed to be doing a satisfactory business. However, the tax lists of 1800 and 1807 show a decline in Samuel's ^{wealth} income. Samuel was also suffering from a rather lengthy illness. Dr. W. B. Hall's ledger indicates that he visited Samuel at least five times a week for the period of about a year 1807-1808. His services rendered included "visits," "consil," "attendance," "dressing," "sponging," and several bottles of tincture.³⁵ It is interesting that in all this time he saw widow Bigelow only once. At first, Dr. Hall addressed his bills to Samuel. After a period of time, they are addressed to Mrs. Bigelow for her son.³⁶ Samuel died on the 26th of August 1808 of "a lingering illness."³⁷ According to Dr. Hall Elizabeth was still paying off Samuel's medical bills in 1809 by notes and goods.

It is unlikely that Elizabeth ran the tavern long after Samuel's death. Both the 1807 and 1810 tax lists show her tax to be \$22.50. It seems likely that she had given up the tavern by that time. I am not sure if Mary Ann Bigelow, Timothy Halsey's wife took over, helped or left. This should be discovered.

After this Elizabeth becomes difficult to trace. There is no mention of her in the 1810 census. As far as I can tell, most of her kin folk died out of left. She outlived her husband and all her children. I couldn't trace Mary Ann Bigelow or John Ingraham Bigelow. He seems to disappear after 1816. Elizabeth's

only relative seems to be her granddaughter Mary Elizabeth Henderson. She turns up in the Trinity Church records in 1821 when she married Henry Woodward of Wethersfield. Elizabeth did live in Middletown until her death on October 14, 1819 of "old age"³⁸ at 94 years of age.

Beers tells us that Elizabeth sold her tavern to the Swathel family who continued to keep a tavern there until 1826. Her estate inventory seems to confirm this. Her list of physical goods is much smaller than that of her husband. In addition, she has none of the land that she received from her husband's estate. The majority of her estate was her investments in shares of the Bank of Middletown valued at \$1892.50. Her entire estate was valued at \$4281.93. Another major portion is made up of notes: Joseph Alsop \$800.00, John Swathel \$600.00, and William R. Swathel \$200.00. There was also \$250.00 cash on hand. The Swathel names would indicate that she had sold the tavern and had invested in the bank.

Elizabeth had only one heir, her granddaughter Mary Elizabeth (Henderson) Woodward. She received all of her grandmother's inventoried estate, less the administrator's expenses. It is significant that Elizabeth did not seem to have any debts. This is somewhat uncommon.

Elizabeth must have been a strong character. She survived her husband by 43 years, brought up four children and ran an apparently successful business and died with a comfortable estate.

Unfortunately, time did not permit further investigations of areas touched upon or exploration of other ideas. The fact that both her sons and her daughter died of long illnesses could

be investigated. John Ingraham Bigelow and Mary Ann Bigelow should be traced. Timothy Bigelow's land should be traced through the land records. Elizabeth's exact location from 1808 to 1819 should be found. The fact that she was a woman and the head of her household should be further investigated. The exact location of the tavern, the significance of its location in town in terms of business and the patrons can be explored. Clarification of the many details in the lives of the Bigelow's is another aspect for further study. The significance of their religion, their social rank and their politics all need some work. In general a brief study like this necessarily opens more questions than it answers.

Addendum: Recent evidence indicates that Elizabeth Bigelow boarded with ~~the wife of~~ Dr. Hall's widow during 1810 -1811. The questions about her other kin still remain. However, the question of the Bigelow's relationship to the Halls now seems to be an area that need investigation.

Endnotes

- 1 J.B. Beers, History of Middlesex County, Connecticut with Biographical Sketches of its Prominent Men. (New York, 1884), .
- 2 H.T. Russel to Simeon Baldwin, Middletown, June 29, 1786.
- 3 Connecticut Courant, February 11, 1772; January 5, 1773; May 20, 1783.
- 4 Connecticut Courant, January 12, 1773; May 22, 1781; July 22, 1783; June 30, 1794.
- 5 Connecticut Courant, September 16, 1783.
- 6 Connecticut Courant, September 2, 1783.
- 7 Connecticut Courant, December 15, 1772.
- 8 Connecticut Courant, October 28, 1783.
- 9 Connecticut Courant, May 25, 1784.
- 10 Connecticut Courant, January 20, 1784.
- 11 Marian Dickinson Terry, Old Inns of Connecticut (Hartford, 1936), 130.
- 12 Connecticut Courant, February 11, 1772.
- 13 Beers, History of Middlesex County, 88: Mapmaker of Barbour: Historical Collections. Both these sources are questionable; further clarification is necessary.
- 14 Diana McLain to James A. Bear, Jr., re: Thomas Jefferson's Memorandum Book for 1791, Hartford, May 1978, Connecticut Historical Society.
- 15 Elizabeth Bigelow to Governor William Franklin, Middletown, October 19, 1791, Connecticut Historical Society.
- 16 Thomas Fleming, ed., Benjamin Franklin: A Biography in His Own Words (New York, 1772); Carl VanDoren, Benjamin Franklin (New York, 1938).
- 17 In the limited time available, I was only able to find out about his relationship to Benjamin Franklin and His Loyalist politics. His business in Middletown needs more clarification.
- 18 Gilman Bigelow Howe, Genealogy of the Bigelow Family of America from the Marriage in 1642 of John Biglo to Mary Warren to the Year 1890 (Worcester, Mass., 1890) 20-21.
- 19 Samuel Bigelow, Last Will and Testament, 1748; Estate Inventory, 1748/9, CSA.
- 20 Mehetabel Bigelow, Estate Inventory, 1750. CSA.

Endnotes

- 21 Beers, History of Middlesex County, 88.
- 22 Howe, Genealogy of the Bigelow Family, 49.
- 23 Barbour states 1753. However, both the Clark and Bigelow Genealogies state 1753. I didn't get to look at the church records in Milford.
- 24 The Trinity Church records indicate that Elizabeth, Halsey (Timothy Halsey, b. 1763), and Sarah (b. 1776) were confirmed into Christ Church on September 17, 1786.
- 25 Timothy Bigelow, Last Will and Testament, 1771, Estate Inventory, 1777. *CSA*
- 26 Howe, Genealogy of the Bigelow Family, 91-92. Since Timothy Halsey dies in 1791 at 28 years of age, further investigation is needed to verify this.
- 27 Middlesex Gazette, August 27, 1791. This was the only reference to T.H. Bigelow as Captain, It needs further work.
- 28 Church of the Holy Trinity Records, 1750-1937, Middletown, This was noted by the minister in the record book for christenings in 1793.
- 29 Clifford Shipton, ed., Sibley's Harvard Graduates, Volume xiv, 1756-1760 (Boston, 1968). I'm not sure of the connection, but some work could be done on William Walter's visit to Middletown and exile to Nova Scotia and the ad in the Connecticut Courant dated May 25, 1784 which was a request for cargo or passage on a vessel going to Nova Scotia. Inquiries were to be made at Widow Bigelow's in Middletown.
- 30 Middlesex Gazette, July 24, 1801.
- 31 Middlesex Gazette, September 4, 1801.
- 32 Middlesex Gazette, April 24, 1795.
- 33 Connecticut Courant, February 5, 1806.
- 34 Connecticut Courant, July 16, 1806.
- 35 William B. Hall, Ledger, 1807-1811, (unpublished).
- 36 Hall, Ledger.
- 37 Middlesex Gazette, September 1, 1808.
- 38 Trinity Church Burial records.

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 Account: 1822, Probate Bond: 1822, Distribution of
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 of Estate: 1759.

Bigelow, John Ingraham. Probate Bond: 1794:

Bigelow, Mehetabel. Estate Inventory: 1750.

Bigelow, Samuel. Last Will and Testament: 1748, Estate
 Inventory: 1748/9, Administration Bond: 1750,
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