

Historic Property Bigelow House
Inventory Report for 918 East Glass Olympia, Thurston, 98506

LOCATION SECTION

Historic Name: Bigelow House **Field Site No.:** 802
Common Name: (#34-830) **OAHP No.:**
Property Address: 918 East Glass Olympia, Thurston, 98506
Comments: OLYMPIA

County **Township/Range/EW Section** **1/4 Sec** **1/4 1/4 Sec** **Quadrangle**
Thurston T18R02W 14 NE TUMWATER

UTM Reference

Zone: 10 **Spatial Type:** Point **Acquisition Code:** TopoZone.com
Sequence: 0 **Easting:** 508380 **Northing:** 5210500

Tax No./Parcel No. **Plat/Block/Lot**
09110151000 D.R. Bigelow DLC portion

Supplemental Map(s) **Acreage**
City of Olympia Planning Department .31

IDENTIFICATION SECTION

Field Recorder: Shanna Stevenson **Date Recorded:** 7/1/1992 **Survey Name:** OLYMPIA

Owner's Name: Bigelow House Preservation Assn **Owner Address:** PO Box 1821 **City/State/Zip:** Olympia, WA 98507

Classification: Building **Resource Status** **Comments**
Within a District? No Survey/Inventory
Contributing? National Register
State Register
Local Register
Other (HABS, HAER)

National Register Nomination: BIGELOW, DANIEL R., HOUSE
Local District:
National Register District/Thematic Nomination Name:

DESCRIPTION SECTION

Historic Use: Domestic - Single Family House
Current Use: Domestic - Single Family House

Plan: Cross/Cruciform **No. of Stories:** 1 1/2

Structural System: Other

Changes to plan: Slight **Changes to interior:** Slight
Changes to original cladding: Intact **Changes to other:**
Changes to windows: Intact **Other (specify):**

Cladding Wood - Clapboard **Foundation** Log
Stone
Concrete - Block
Concrete - Poured
Style Gothic - Gothic Revival **Form/Type** Single Family - Cross Gable
Roof Material Asphalt / Composition **Roof Type** Gable

NARRATIVE SECTION

Study Unit

Other

Date Of Construction: 1860

Architecture/Landscape Architecture

Architect:

Other

cultural maritime resources o

Builder:

Engineer:

Property appears to meet criteria for the National Register of Historic Places:

Yes

Property is located in a historic district (National and/or local):

No

Property potentially contributes to a historic district (National and/or local):

Statement of Significance

The significance of the Bigelow House rests on its architecture and, more importantly, on its association with Daniel R. Bigelow, pioneer lawyer and member of the first legislature of the territory of Washington. The considerable height of the house and its steep gables stand out impressively, and the grounds are still spacious by modern standards. When viewed from the south and west, the high gable ends and the remaining ornamentation are still strongly evocative of the past. Built by 1860, the Bigelow House is one of the oldest buildings remaining in Olympia. The Gothic Revival style, common at the time this house was built, declined soon afterwards in popularity, and this house is one of the few remaining examples of the Olympia area. 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, and in Indiana and Wisconsin 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. 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 County of Thurston 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 Bigelow 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 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 were the first Americans to permanently 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 R. 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. Bigelow was also keenly interested in education. He was elected Superintendent of the Olympia School District in November 1853 and was president of the Board of Trustees of the Puget Sound Wesleyan Institute. This 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. Daniel Bigelow died in 1905 at the age of 81.

Ann Elizabeth White, was just 14 when her family came west from Wisconsin in 1851. Her father made the journey first, to see if Oregon Territory would improve his health. After deciding the place agreed with him, he wrote to his wife and told her to follow with their five children. She did, bringing the whole family safely through a grueling trip of illness, exhaustion, and storms. The White family settled near Portland, but soon were flooded out. They moved north to land on the Chehalis River, but were flooded out again. Finally they settled about 12 miles east of Olympia, on Chambers Prairie. By the time she was 17, Ann Elizabeth was teaching school in a private house near the Nisqually River. As she later summed up the experience, "I taught the three Rs with no frills." In 1854, a few months before turning 18, she married Daniel Bigelow and moved with him to his land claim. Together they raised eight children in the big white house they built overlooking Puget Sound. Mrs. Bigelow was an accomplished horsewoman (although, in later life, she was also very fond of motor cars) and an ardent gardener. She died in 1926.

In 1994 the Bigelow House was purchased from the Bigelow family by the private, non-profit Bigelow House Preservation Association. Daniel Sylvester Bigelow (grandson of the first Bigelows) and his wife Mary Ann, retain a life estate in the property and continue to live in the house while the first floor is open to the public. The house was restored in 1995 as closely as possible to the way it looked in the days of Washington Territory, complete with many of the original furnishings.

Description of Physical Appearance

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 Street, 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 Street. The Bigelow House has a cruciform floorplan, with the longer axis, which is parallel to Glass Street, 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. One highly unusual architectural element is the foundation. The house

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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. 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 house was completely renovated in 1995 restoring many of its lost features. It is currently open on a restricted basis as a museum. The combination stable and woodshed, located to the north of the house itself, 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 and for storage of farm implements and other articles acquired over the long history of these structures.

**Major
Bibliographic
References**

Bancroft, Hubert H., History of Washington, Idaho and Montana 1845-1890, (San Francisco, 1890), p.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).

Hunt, Herbert and Floyd C. Kaylor, Washington, West of the Cascades, (2 vols., Tacoma, 1917), Vol. 1, pages 115, 134.)

Meany, Edmond S., History of the State of Washington, (New York, 1909), pp. 155-156, 164.

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Snowden, Clinton A., History of Washington,(5 vols., New York, 1909), Vol. III, pages 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 vols., in one), Vol 3, page 199.

PHOTOS



View of west facade

taken 9/1/1997

Photography Neg. No. (Roll No./Frame No.):

43-7

Comments: