



Caswell Matters

E-newsletter of the Caswell County Historical Association

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Editor

Greetings

Because this newsletter is distributed electronically, we need your current email address. Send to the CCHA [webmaster](#) any changes. We also welcome comments and all you are willing to share about the history of Caswell County and the genealogy of its people.

This monthly e-newsletter and the quarterly newsletter always will be found online in the [Members-Only Area](#) of the CCHA website.

Caswell County Genealogy: Bigelow Family ¹



Those with slave ancestors have a challenge conducting genealogical research. And, the Bigelow family of Caswell County has a double challenge. Some descend from Thomas Pattillo Bigelow (1802-1873), who is white, and others descend from his slaves. They are categorized as the “name” Bigelows and the “slave” Bigelows.

The origins of this family are confusing. Thomas Pattillo Bigelow is the son of a Pattillo and wife Elizabeth. Elizabeth Pattillo had at least three children: Thomas Pattillo (whose family is the principal focus of this article); Mary Pattillo; and Elizabeth Pattillo. All three Pattillo children assumed the

¹ This article is dedicated to Valerie Jean Wilson Payne (1951-2010), second-great granddaughter of Thomas Pattillo Bigelow. Her Bigelow family research was pioneering. Additional references and resources relating to the Bigelow family are listed at the end of the newsletter.

surname of their stepfather when Elizabeth Pattillo married Roderick Bigelow (1756-1819) November 20, 1811, in Warren County, North Carolina.²

Thus, for purposes of the Caswell County Genealogy database the children are shown as, for example, Thomas Pattillo Bigelow. While not genealogically correct as there is no record of adoption by Roderick Bigelow, it makes the ancestral outline easier to follow.³

Thomas Pattillo Bigelow was a successful Caswell County lawyer whose name is found in scores of legal documents. In 1871, he was one of the founders of the Bank of Caswell. He was among the earliest members of the Caswell County Agricultural Society. In 1854 Thomas Pattillo Bigelow was appointed to a committee of leading men of Caswell County responsible for the first Caswell County Agricultural Fair.

When a railroad was proposed to run from Milton to Yanceyville and on southward, Thomas Pattillo Bigelow was appointed one of the Commissioners to sell stock. Among his co-commissioners were John Azariah Graves (lawyer), Samuel P. Hill (lawyer), Thomas D. Johnston (president of the Bank of Yanceyville), and George Williamson (prominent plantation owner).

The real property holdings of Thomas Pattillo Bigelow were significant. He owned much of the land south of Yanceyville that became the North Carolina State Wildlife Refuge (Caswell Game Lands). This would be in the Burton Chapel Road area. Note two roads intersecting with the Burton Chapel Road are: Old Bigelow Road; and Mary Jane Bigelow Road.

Some remember a Bigelow "mansion house" in this area that purportedly was at some point purchased by a Johnston/Johnson and subsequently burned. Also, there have been reports of a Bigelow family cemetery in the area. The 1868 Caswell County School Districts Map identified what apparently were significant land holders. Among these, south of Yanceyville, is "T. Bigalow." For decades the road leading south from Yanceyville toward Alamance County was called "Bigelow Road." It now is Highway 62 South.

² For more on the white Bigelow family go to: <http://bigelowsociety.com/>

³ Caswell County Genealogy Database: <https://caswellcountync.org/genealogy/index.php>

Thomas Pattillo Bigelow owned slaves and apparently had fourteen children with one of them, Elizabeth (Betsy) Brighton. Some claim, but without any supporting documentation, that Betsy Bigelow was of Native American ancestry (Cherokee or Saponi).

Did Thomas Pattillo Bigelow marry the mother of his children? Of interest, of course, is his will, which provides as follows in relevant part (emphasis added):

"Item 13 - I give and bequeath to Betsy Bigelow **who was once my slave** and has attended to me in sickness and who has treated me kindly and nursed me in my old age the balance of my personal property consisting of Horses, cattle, hogs, household and kitchen furniture also farming utensils, crops of every kind, also all debts, moneys, effects of every kind not heretofore given away.

"I give and bequeath to Betsy Bigelow the same person named in Item 13 the balance of my Real estate not given off in this will including the Mansion and it surroundings also if from any cause the lands bought of the heirs of Thomas Covington died should fall to my Estate then and in that case, I give the same to Betsy Bigelow, with the same restrictions that I make in regard to my other real estate given her this will. I mean all other Real estate given Betsy Bigelow she shall have during her lifetime and then to be equally divided between Betsy Bigelows children named in this will."

Thus, Thomas Pattillo Bigelow referred to Elizabeth (Betsy) as "once my slave" but not as his wife.

Based upon the will of Thomas Pattillo Bigelow and census records, it seems likely that his children were: (1) William Bigelow; (2) John Henry Bigelow; (3) Albert Bigelow; (4) Cora Virginia Bigelow; (5) Saluda Bigelow; (6) Mary E. Bigelow; (7) Laura Bigelow; (8) Nancy Bigelow; (9) James Bigelow; (10) Lewis Bigelow; (11) George Bigelow; (12) Elizabeth Bigelow; (13) Sicily Bigelow; and (14) Zachariah Bigelow.

According to a Bigelow family member, John Henry Bigelow was invited to a white man's house for dinner and a cigar. Not long afterwards someone told the man that "John Henry Bigelow wasn't white." The man said to his friend, "he fooled

me." The man replied, "no, you fooled yourself." Then the man said, "if he married your daughter, their kids would look just like you."



John Henry Bigelow (photograph) purportedly related that his father Thomas Pattillo Bigelow told his children, "if anybody messes with you, knock the hell out of them."

John Henry Bigelow said that Thomas Pattillo Bigelow was fair with his slaves and let them roam at night. One night, a slave was visiting on another plantation with a young lady in a cabin. When the owners caught him, they chased him, and they fell in a ditch. The slave ran back to Thomas Pattillo Bigelow's plantation. The next day, the neighboring plantation owner came to Thomas Pattillo Bigelow and asked for the slave to flog. Thomas Pattillo Bigelow said, "Neither animal nor human will be flogged on my land. If you had caught him on your land, there would be nothing I could do, but he's on my land now and I won't stand for it."



Many of the children of Thomas Pattillo Bigelow and Elizabeth (Betsy) Bigelow were well-educated and moved from Caswell County – especially those who could “pass” as white. Caswell County census records categorized them as mulatto.

Thomas Pattillo Bigelow provided for the education of at least six of his children at Shaw University. University catalogues 1876-1877 and 1878-1879 list the Bigelow children: Saluda Bigelow, Mary E. Bigelow, Laura Bigelow, James Thomas Bigelow (in photo), John Henry, and Albert Bigelow - all from Yanceyville. Also, it may be that Albert and Lewis Bigelow helped start the Yanceyville School for Coloreds in 1897.

Note that the 1878-1879 Shaw University Catalogue lists Miss Saluda Bigelow as an Assistant Teacher (appointed by the President from among the pupils). A reasonable presumption is that she was an outstanding student.

Aunt Saluda purportedly shared with a nephew stories about her father, Thomas Pattillo Bigelow, and how he "took his children everywhere with him and didn't deny them to anyone." She also said they "weren't his slaves, but mulattos-issue free." Saluda married a Hunt in Ringgold, Virginia. Her grandson (deceased) was a professor at a Texas University.

We continue to explore:

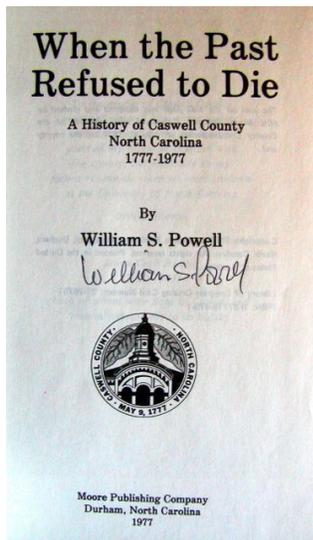
1. Identity of the Pattillo father of Thomas Pattillo Bigelow
 2. Identity of Elizabeth, the mother of Thomas Pattillo Bigelow
 3. Betsey, the "wife" of Thomas Pattillo Bigelow
 4. Thomas Pattillo Bigelow "mansion house"
 5. Burial location of Thomas Pattillo Bigelow, who died in Caswell County
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Richmond-Miles History Museum



Unfortunately, the Richmond-Miles History Museum in Yanceyville, North Carolina, is closed and will remain so indefinitely. The CCHA owns and operates the Museum. We are exploring ways to provide CCHA members a virtual Museum experience.

Book Review



This month our review is of a Caswell County staple, one of the essentials.⁴ Leading up to the 200th anniversary of Caswell County's formation, to be celebrated in 1977, H. G. Jones and M. Q. Plumblee persuaded renowned North Carolina historian William S. Powell to write the history of Caswell County. A \$10,000 fee helped Bill Powell decide to accept the job.

The result: Powell, William S. *When the Past Refused to Die: A History of Caswell County North Carolina 1777-1977*. Durham: Moore Publishing Company, 1977.

The book is, in the opinion of this editor, one of the best North Carolina county histories. Faultless? No. Ignored important aspects of Caswell's history? Yes. But, overall deserving a place in your library? Yes.

Here is the dedication:

"To the people of Caswell County many of I have come to love and appreciate during the several years of my recent association with the county, but especially to my former roommate when we were students at the University of North Carolina – Ottaway Burton – and to the memory of our mutual friend James Cecil Pointer (1920-1943) both of whom were Sons of Caswell and who introduced me to its history."

The chapters are:

1. Lay of the Land
2. Indian to English
3. Foundations

⁴ A comprehensive annotated Caswell County bibliography, including a list of the "essentials," is available to CCHA members as part of the CCHA Website Members-Only Area:

<https://ncccha.org/memoranda/membersonly/membersonlyaccesspage.html>

4. Before the War
5. Civil War

6. The Ku Klux Klan and the Kirk-Holden War
7. A Sluggish Half Century, 1870-1920
8. In Recent Years
9. Some Caswell Communities and Neighborhoods
10. Education

11. Culture and Crafts
12. Churches
13. Agriculture
14. Transportation
15. Some Notes on Black History

Appendices list county officials, such as legislative representatives, clerks of the court, postmasters, and sheriffs. There is an extensive index prepared by Bill Powell's wife Virginia Waldrop Powell (who handled Bill's correspondence until his death).

The book was out-of-print for many years. However, the CCHA reprinted it in paperback form. It is available online (\$35, excluding sales tax and shipping):

<https://ncccha.org/memoranda/publications.html>

Membership Drive



The CCHA membership drive continues. If you know someone with an interest in the history of Caswell County and the genealogy of its people, please let them know about the CCHA. Joining is simple and can be done online with a credit card (only \$25 annually).

CCHA Membership:

<https://ncccha.org/memoranda/membership.html>

CCHA Board and Officers

Jim Hilton (President)

Cyrus Vernon (Vice President)

Joyce Miller (Secretary)

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Cash, Kimberly

Farmer, Lee

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Nidle, Jeff

Oestreicher, Karen

Oestreicher, Steve

Upcoming Events

The next CCHA event would be the annual Membership Meeting at the Richmond-Miles History Museum in Yanceyville: agenda, date, and time to be determined. Note that the meeting may be postponed due to ongoing health concerns. However, we are investigating how to conduct the meeting remotely.

CCHA Online Presence

CCHA Main Website

<https://ncccha.org/index.html>

Caswell County Genealogy

<https://caswellcountync.org/genealogy/>

CCHA Photograph Collection

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/ncccha/>

CCHA Weblog

<https://ncccha.blogspot.com/>

CCHA Facebook Page

<https://www.facebook.com/CaswellCountyHistoricalAssociation/>

The CCHA also is a major contributor to the following:

Cemetery Census

<https://cemeterycensus.com/nc/casw/index.htm>

Caswell County on Find A Grave

https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/search?name=&locationId=county_1667

Contacts, Links and References

CCHA Membership

<https://ncccha.org/memoranda/membership.html>

Members-Only Area

<https://ncccha.org/memoranda/membersonly/>

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Bigelow Family

Albert Atkinson Pattillo Letter

<https://ncccha.blogspot.com/2012/08/albert-atkinson-pattillo-1819-c1870.html>

Bigelow Family Photograph Collection

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/ncccha/sets/72157606889985649/>

Bigelow-Pattillo Marriage Record

<https://ncccha.blogspot.com/2010/09/bigelow-pattillo-marriage-1811.html>

Bigelow Society

<http://bigelowsociety.com/>

Estate of Thomas Bigelow v. Pleasant and Hood (1874)

<https://ncccha.blogspot.com/2008/10/estate-of-thomas-bigelow-vs-stephen-w.html>

Family of Dora Belle Williamson Bigelow: Whitlow, Jeannine D., Editor. *The Heritage of Caswell County North Carolina 1985*. Winston-Salem: Hunter Publishing Company, 1985 at 103-104 (Article #42 "The Family of Dora Belle Williamson Bigelow" by Dora Belle Williamson Bigelow).

Hunt Town School

<https://ncccha.blogspot.com/2010/08/hunt-town-school.html>

Pattillo v. Pierson

<https://ncccha.blogspot.com/2008/10/pattillo-v-pierson-1876.html>

Thomas Pattillo Bigelow (1802-1873)

<https://ncccha.blogspot.com/2009/06/thomas-pattillo-bigelow-1802-1873.html>