

RED ROCKS AND RACE CARS:
CHARLES BIGELOW AND THE ARROWHEAD HIGHWAY

Lisa Michele Church



INTRODUCTION

When he drove his 1907 Reo roadster across the rugged sandstone slopes of southern Utah, Charles Bigelow became one of the first automobile tourists to fall in love with the red rock country. He certainly wouldn't be the last. Even though he grew up as the son of a railroad man in the Illinois forest, Bigelow was destined for the open road. In America's southwest desert he saw both beauty and potential. He used his gift for gab and his adventurous spirit during the early 20th century to change the landscape of Utah forever.

In between his lonely record-setting desert drives, Bigelow wrote hundreds of national newspaper articles extolling the gorgeous scenery of the west. Each article reveals his passion for pathfinding and he meticulously pasted them into an old-

fashioned scrapbook from 1908 to 1932.¹ Bigelow was determined to improve the overland highways by organizing road crews and raising money. Utah's Arrowhead Highway – precursor to Interstate 15 – stands as a monument to his efforts.

Early American road promoters were a visionary breed of men, most of them sponsored by either a car company or a newspaper. In the west they were paid to explore new and shorter ways across challenging terrain where only wagons traveled before. They literally paved the way for a tourism industry that would attract millions of people to Utah for years to come.

WHO WAS CHARLES BIGELOW?

Nothing specific in Bigelow's childhood indicates he would pursue a career with automobiles. In fact, he probably didn't see a car until he was well into his twenties. He grew up in rural Menard County, a few hours south of Chicago, and the first sale of an American car didn't take place until 1896 when he was 24 years old: "Bicycle mechanics J. Frank and Charles Duryea of Springfield, Massachusetts, had designed the first successful American gasoline automobile in 1893, then won the first American car race in 1895, and went on to make the first sale of an American-made gasoline car the next year."²

Chicago was the scene of the nation's first auto race in 1895 and Bigelow may have traveled to see the excitement. The Chicago Times-Herald came up with the idea of running a car race through the city and awarding a \$5,000 prize to the winner in July, 1895. Cars were relatively unknown at the time and the paper wanted to promote the revolutionary industry. Only 8 of the 83 entrants showed up to race, and some of them had only two wheels. The Duryea brothers finished the race first in their motorized wagon and the story of the first car race was carried in newspapers nationwide.³

Bigelow was definitely in Chicago on March 25, 1903 because he was getting married that day to Harriet (Hattie) Estelle Ingraham at the Cook County Courthouse.⁴ Bigelow was 30 years old and Hattie was 25. During the next few years the entire Bigelow family made their way to the California coast.

¹ The Charles Bigelow Scrapbook was donated to the Dixie State University Special Collections, St. George, Utah, where it is available for research. The scrapbook is in a wooden box, measures about 2 feet by 3 feet, and consists of 78 pages containing numerous news articles describing western road trips by Bigelow and others. (hereafter "Charles Bigelow Scrapbook.")

² www.history.com/topics/automobiles, 9/15/2018.

³ Encyclopedia of Chicago, "Chicago Times-Herald Race of 1895," by Keith R. Gill, copyright 2005, Chicago Historical Society. www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org, 9/4/2018.

⁴ Cook County Marriage Records, 1870-1920, www.familysearch.org, 5/13/2012.

BIGELOW GOES WEST

By 1910, when Henry Ford's Model T became wildly popular, Bigelow and Hattie were living in Los Angeles with his parents, Edwin and Sarah, and his older schoolteacher sister, Emma. Bigelow's 75-year-old father worked as a real estate agent and Bigelow described himself as a promoter.⁵ Bigelow was beginning to explore the surrounding states with his wife; they stayed at the Hotel Nevada in Las Vegas, Nevada as early as 1907⁶:

"C.H. Bigelow, who is making a record of desert roads for Southern California auto associations, came through from Searchlight last week, via El Dorado Canyon, in his Reo car, probably the first to make the trip...Mr. Bigelow was accompanied by his wife and H.E. Paggett. His exploration is expected to result in a complete system of duly marked desert roads throughout Southern California and Southern Nevada."⁷

A few months later, Bigelow was reportedly driving between California and Nevada attempting to set speed records:

"Charles H. Bigelow is now touring Nevada in his two-cylinder Reo roadster. He wrote from the Owens river country that the car was showing up in its usual classy style. From the Owens river country Bigelow drove into Nevada, and says he will try for the Goldfield-Los Angeles record on his return."⁸

Bigelow was caught up in the first wave of early car ownership and promotion which occurred in America from 1905 through the early 1920s. During this time, cars exploded in the American consciousness, first as a novelty, then as a source of entertainment such as speed racing, and finally as a means to freedom and movement across large distances. By 1945, the American car's use in everyday family life was bringing vast implications for the western economy.

Tourism -- which was not practical in wagons nor very effective in trains -- became immediately possible once you sat behind the wheel of your own vehicle. You were free to set your own course, see things of your own choosing, and travel at your own pace. These possibilities captured the imagination of a generation and set the dramatically beautiful American west up for wild success as a travel destination.

⁵ U.S. Census, 1910, www.familysearch.org, 5/13/2012.

⁶ *Las Vegas Age*, "Hotel Nevada Arrivals," 12/7/1907, www.digital.lvcld.org

⁷ *Las Vegas Age*, "Desert Autoing," 12/14/1907, www.digital.lvcld.org

⁸ *Los Angeles Herald*, "Bigelow Will Try for Goldfield Record," 8/2/1908, www.newspapers.com, 9/7/2018.

In 1899, a few years after the first American car was sold, 2,500 cars were on the road. Car ownership surged to 8,000 in the next year and jumped again exponentially over the next decade, from 194,400 American cars in 1908 to 305,960 in 1909.⁹

Still, in 1910 there were only 873 cars in Utah¹⁰ and many adults had not yet seen a car on the streets of their own town:

“Townspople in the small agricultural community of Enterprise reportedly got their first glimpse of a car in July 1910 when William Perry, the U.S. mail contractor, came ‘chugging’ into town. ‘It came right along without anything to pull it,’ Orson Huntsman recalled. For some in town it was the first car they had seen and they looked on with curious amazement. In Hurricane, another rural southern Utah town, it was not until around 1915 that residents reported seeing their first automobile. According to young Alice Isom Gubler Stratton, it came roaring, popping, and chugging into town ‘laying a trail of dust [and] puffing clouds of smoke from its rear.’ The auto ‘made terrible noise, and smelled awful, but it ran without horses....the wheels had wooden spokes, were smaller than wagon wheels and had rubber tires.’”¹¹

Early American cars were either touring cars or racing machines.¹² Because cars were such a disruptive technology of the time and their advantages relatively unknown, car companies promoted car races as a method of showing what the vehicles could do. Car racing was different from horse racing due to the sheer speed achieved by the early automobiles. Manufacturers sponsored a race driver by letting him drive their brand of car and placing newspaper reporters in the car along with him. In this way the event garnered widespread publicity for the winning brand, provoking interest in cars from the buying public.

One of the most elite racing brands in 1910 was the sleek Mercer Raceabout, the car of choice by Charles Bigelow in several of his winning races. The Mercer was “[p]atrician of line with a litheness never before achieved, contemptuous of its rivals, and endowed with a performance so effortless that it smacked of arrogance, the Mercer heralded the dawn of a new era in production automobiles suitable for competition.”¹³

⁹ State Motor Vehicle Registrations by Years 1900-1995, www.fhwa.dot.gov, 9/6/2018.

¹⁰ [History Blazer](http://www.historyblazer.com), “The First Cars in Two Small Towns,” W. Paul Reeve, October, 1996, www.historytogo.utah.gov, 9/8/2018.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² “By 1910 no fewer than forty-six manufacturers listed sporty-looking runabouts, roadsters, and torpedo runabouts with bucket seats, a rear mounted tank and sweeping fenders; and prices ran all the way from \$700 for the 20 horsepower four cylinder EMF Flanders Model 20S to the \$5,500 Chadwick 60 horsepower six-cylinder Runabout.” John Bentley, *Great American Automobiles*, Bonanza Books, New York, 1957, p. 11.

¹³ *Id.* at 283.

The Mercer Automobile Company of Trenton, N.J. began in 1909 as the brainchild of the Roebling brothers, better known for their construction of the Brooklyn Bridge. They designed and hand-crafted each Mercer with a “torpedo” body and built every component to withstand the stress of competition.¹⁴

BIGELOW’S CAR RACING CAREER

“The Desert Rat”

The earliest race in which Bigelow competed was the first-ever 400-mile Los Angeles to Phoenix overland race of 1908. Bigelow, 36, was the partner to lead driver Bert Latham in a Kissel Kar which came in second place. They drove the nearly impassable rock course in about 30 hours, one hour behind the winning time of 29 hours and 20 minutes. Although there were only four contestants, the race was a rousing success, as the Arizona Republic described it:

“The excitement caused by this race, both in Los Angeles and Phoenix, was intense. In this city there was little else talked about during the day except the great race...In the whole history of Phoenix there has never been an event which has produced such spontaneous interest and such unusual excitement as this motor race...”¹⁵

Bigelow was characterized by the newspaper as the perfect driving partner for Latham, who held “a number of desert records.”¹⁶ Bigelow entered the same race again the following year, when he drove a Reo car and even served as the pilot car on a test drive before the start: “Charles Bigelow has been over the road many times. In fact, he knows Arizona and California roads better than almost anyone else. He piloted the first car over the course last year...”¹⁷

In January, 1909, Bigelow raced in the Corona Road Race and won in his Reo:

“In a cross country run from Corona to Temecula and return, C.H. Bigelow of Los Angeles, known as one of the most intrepid motorists in this part of the state, succeeded in clipping 32 minutes from the round trip records of 3 hours and 26 minutes, formerly held by the Tourist.”¹⁸

¹⁴ *Id.* at 285.

¹⁵ Arizona Republic, “White Steamer Wins Arizona Republican Cup,” 11/10/1908, www.newspapers.com, 9/5/2018.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Arizona Republic, “Pilot Car Gets Here,” 10/21/1909, www.newspapers.com, 9/5/2018.

¹⁸ Los Angeles Times, “Reo Clips Half Hour from Round Trip Corona to Temecula,” 1/1909, Charles Bigelow Scrapbook.

In May, 1909 Charles Bigelow performed the astounding feat of driving from New York to Los Angeles, including traversing the Santa Fe Trail, a grueling wagon road that went from Independence, Missouri to Santa Fe, New Mexico. He reportedly drove the entire route alone, taking 21 days.¹⁹

Racing again in November, 1910, Bigelow took off from Los Angeles to Phoenix in a crowd of 14 competitors driving his Mercer Raceabout and came in third with a running time of 19 hours, 3 minutes.²⁰ The racers were shaving considerable time off the race each year it was run.

1911 turned out to be a banner year for Bigelow's racing career; he raced in several big races and was profiled by the Los Angeles Sunday Times as the driver to beat in the upcoming race season:

"Charles H. Bigelow is to drive the Mercer racer in the Panama Pacific road race at Oakland and in several other events planned for this year. Bigelow has made arrangements with the Mercer factory in Trenton, N.J. to enter the big meet in the West with his four-cylinder...which made a good showing in the Santa Monica road race.

There is no better driver in the West than Bigelow. He knows how to use his head at the right time. He never gets rattled no matter how hard affairs go against him. He takes a curve like a veteran, and is never defeated until the race is over."²¹

Possibly the highlight of Bigelow's competitive career was his race in the inaugural Indianapolis 500, a national sensation at the brickyard. Bigelow was profiled in the Indianapolis Star before the race:

"Charles H. Bigelow is a native of Los Angeles, Cal. is 38 years old, and has done all of his driving on the Pacific Coast. He is familiarly known on the coast as the 'Desert Rat' due to the fact that most of his exploits have been performed over the Great American Desert. He has driven in Phoenix-to-LA road races; and, in fact, originally laid out that course.

One year he drove a Reo, the next a Kissel car, and this year a Mercer, in which he finished fourth in the time of 19 hours, which broke last year's record.

He drove a Mercer car in the Santa Monica road race in the light car class and was well ahead of the field in the ninth lap when he was forced to withdraw due to engine trouble.

¹⁹ The Indianapolis Star, "Bigelow," 5/28/1911, p. 21, www.newspapers.com, 9/6/2018.

²⁰ Arizona Republic, "Kissel Kar's Koin in Grinding Finish," 11/8/10, www.newspapers.com, 9/6/2018.

²¹ Los Angeles Sunday Times, "The Pink Sheet – Sporting Section – Bigelow and the Mercer Racer Ready for the Race Season," 1/10/1911, Charles Bigelow Scrapbook.

During May, 1909, he drove a Mercer car from New York to Los Angeles, via the Santa Fe Trail, a route which had never been covered by an automobile before, in twenty-one days. This was done without relay of drives; and, in fact, he drove the entire distance himself.

On the 17th of February, (1911) he won the light-car class in the Panama Pacific race with a Mercer Raceabout, averaging fifty-five miles an hour and completely distancing the field.”²²

During the final leg of the 1911 Indy 500, Bigelow’s Mercer was flagged after 194 laps -- either for a mechanical failure or a rule violation - and did not finish, but he was in 15th place at that time and only 6 laps short of the completing the entire race.²³

After the Indy 500, Bigelow turned back to overland long-distance road races, competing in the October 14, 1911 Santa Monica race (finishing 7th in a Lexington car)²⁴ and in the 1911 and 1912 Los Angeles to Phoenix races again:

“The annual Los Angeles-Phoenix race was put on for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was to highlight the need for a coast-to-coast highway, which at that time did not exist...Charles H. Bigelow, in a Mercedes, barely avoided {Louis} Nikrent’s wreck at Archibald but at Etiwanda Avenue went careening out of control into the sand. He got back to the road, but found he had broken a shock absorber and a truss rod. Three hours later, using available parts in Ontario, he got the repairs made and was back on the road again, ready for more adventures.”²⁵

Bigelow left track and overland racing in the next few years to devote himself to full-time road promotion and became an extensively published travel writer throughout the next two decades.

²² [Indianapolis Star](#), “Indy 500,” 5/28/1911, p. 21, www.newspapers.com, 9/6/2018.

²³ www.wikipedia.org/wiki/1911_Indianapolis_500, 9/6/2018.

²⁴ www.teamdan.com/archive/gen/indycar/1911, 9/5/2018.

²⁵ www.Dailybulletin.com, 8/16/2010, Joe Blackstock, “1912, “L.A. to Phoenix race a crash fest for crowds.”



Bigelow at the wheel in the inaugural Indy 500, 1911



BIGELOW BECOMES A PROMOTER OF GOOD ROADS

“Father of the Arrowhead Trail”

It is no surprise that Bigelow, at 42 years old, left the harrowing speed racing world. He was at least ten years older than the national racing stars such as Terrible Teddy Tetzlaff or Eddie Pullen and it was becoming a younger man’s game. Instead, Bigelow chose to work full-time with the Southern California tourism promoters and car companies to explore the west. He could still drive in risky conditions, investigate remote routes and see new country, but he didn’t have to win the race to get paid for his efforts.

Tourism and tourism promotion were in their infancy, with most of the efforts made by individuals, town boosters, local businesses, and newspapers. Attracting visitors to a small rural town in the middle of the desert seemed absurd to many who struggled to establish the town. Longtime St. George, Utah businessman Sid Atkin remembered the surprise he felt when he realized people would come to his remote town just for the scenery: "It was a heady thing to realize that tourism was an industry where they would bring the money to us. Before tourism, we had to ship our fruit and other products out of the community. We thought it was a wonderful thing that people would stay with us and leave their money here."²⁶

One of the best things about automobile tourists is that they would come and *leave*. They didn't require a large infrastructure investment – other than motels, cafes, and gas stations – because they were there to see the natural landscape. The revenue tourists generated outstripped the costs, so long as the roads were in good enough condition to move them along to their next stop.

Bigelow became passionate about improving the roads as an outgrowth of his long distance driving across California, Arizona, Nevada and Utah. His firsthand experience with road conditions spurred him on: "Bar none, California has the worst desert roads in the country," Bigelow told a newspaper in 1908. "I have motored in Utah, New Mexico and Nevada, but there is nothing to equal the roads in California. There is not a single sign board that gives the miles to the nearest water hole, and the maps are unreliable in this feature as the holes are often twelve miles from the place indicated."²⁷ He repeatedly encountered large rocks, sand dunes, quicksand, deep rivers without bridges, and steep inclines that tested his car. He recognized that a winter storm could isolate towns from one valley to the next for several months without a passable highway. With his detailed knowledge of road conditions in the west, he was the perfect partner for car companies and tourism promoters who wanted to encourage road improvement.

According to Arrowhead Trail scholar Edward Leo Lyman, Bigelow was recruited about 1914 by the Automobile Club of Southern California as the driver of a "scout car" which would search out the most practicable routes.²⁸ The Club would then organize efforts to improve that particular route. He also worked with businessmen in both Redlands, California and Las Vegas, Nevada to promote the Arrowhead Trail as both an outstanding potential tourist route and a road in need of improvement.

²⁶ Lisa Michele Church, "St. George Roadside Motels," Utah Historical Quarterly, Winter 2012, 37.

²⁷ Arizona Republic, "The Pioneers in Cup Race," 10/23/1908, p. 8, www.newspapers.com, 9/6/2018.

²⁸ Lyman, Edward Leo, "The Arrowhead Trails Highway: The Beginnings of Utah's Other Route to the Pacific Coast," Utah Historical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 3, Summer 1999. Lyman is the pre-eminent scholar on the Arrowhead Trail and has published extensively with detailed accounts of highway development and construction with regard that route. See also "The Arrowhead Trails Highway: California's Predecessor to Interstate 15", by Edward Leo Lyman, Southern California Quarterly, Volume LXXXI No. 3, Fall 1999, p. 312-340.

The Los Angeles to Salt Lake overland route began to be called The Arrowhead Trail in the early 1900s when the San Bernardino Society of California Pioneers recognized the group of Mormon pioneers from Utah who blazed the route in the 1800s. In September, 1905 they invited the Utahns to their city and gave them an arrowhead souvenir as a remembrance.²⁹ Lyman notes that the name “came from an arrowhead figure clearly visible on the mountain slope at San Bernardino. It is unclear whether vegetation was intentionally removed to form the arrowhead or whether it is a natural phenomenon.”³⁰

“CACTUS KATE II” – BIGELOW’S PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN BEGINS

One of Bigelow’s boldest self-promotion efforts came in May, 1916 when he and his fellow former speed racer, Louis Nickrent, embarked on the famous Cactus Kate II adventure.³¹ In a Packard Twin Six, the two drivers took two publicists and drove straight through from Los Angeles to Salt Lake to prove there was an all-weather route to the coast.

“Cactus Kate II, her checkerboard paint besmeared with mud, arrived in Salt Lake last night after pushing her way across mountain and desert over the Old Mormon trail from Los Angeles...The party consisting of Driver [Louis] Nickrent, W.S. Wood, advertising manager for the Earl C. Anthony, Inc. of Los Angeles; Charles Bigelow, good roads booster of Los Angeles, and I.K. Dewein, Hearst Vitagraph weekly representative, carries a letter from the Los Angeles chamber of commerce to the Salt Lake Commercial Club.

The purpose of the trip has been to blaze and log the Old Mormon trail – an all winter route to the coast – later to be renamed...the total distance covered by Cactus Kate was 313 miles, to be reduced about seventy miles by proposed cutoffs. ‘The feature of this highway,’ said Mr. Woods, ‘is its scenic wonders. There is no scenery on any tri-state highway to equal what we have seen in the past nine days. Little Zion canyon, near St. George in Utah, outshadows even California’s wonderful scenery. All along the route we were given rousing welcomes.’”³²

²⁹ Salt Lake Herald, “Trail Blazers Back in Zion,” 10/19/1905, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com, 8/3/2018.

³⁰ Lyman, Utah Historical Quarterly article, at 243, footnote 9.

³¹ The original Cactus Kate blazed the trail from Los Angeles to Ely in what was then called “The Midland Trail” but eventually became the Lincoln Highway. Salt Lake Telegram, “Cactus Kate II: Slain With Paint After Busy Life,” 7/30/1916, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com

³² Salt Lake Telegram, “Blazing Trail L.A. to Salt Lake Cactus Kate II Arrives in Town”, 5/21/1916, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com.

Bigelow's Cactus Kate trip was his breakout stunt; it was highly publicized in several national newspapers and cemented his reputation as a road promoter. He was personally quoted in articles as to the suitability of the road for the average traveler:

"From a practical standpoint as well as a scenic, the Arrowhead trail cannot be equaled by any other route...[it] passes through mile after mile of wonderful sandstone erosions, a formation to be found on no other cross-country route...for the experienced driver with a good car the Arrowhead trail is a practical route today."³³

A month later, in July, 1916, Bigelow assembled a group to return to Utah traveling the same LA to SLC route in a Hudson Six, always touting the scenery and road conditions of Utah. The group met with Utah Governor William Spry when they arrived in Salt Lake and Bigelow told the local paper, "the trail is the best improved road crossing any of the Western states for the same distance."³⁴

As a result of Bigelow's July trip, Goodrich Tire Company began installing metal signs at every crossroad and junction along the Arrowhead Trail at their own cost of \$15,000.³⁵ The unique Arrowhead signs identified the road for unfamiliar drivers. This was a tangible result of his efforts to promote the highway.

Bigelow then planned a third trip for the fall with "a tour made by a large number of Arrowhead highway enthusiasts, who are boosting for a short automobile line between San Bernardino valley and Salt Lake."³⁶

Meanwhile, back in California, Bigelow teamed up with his friend, Douglas White of the Salt Lake railroad company, and others to organize the Arrowhead Trails Association. The group met in Redlands, California during early July, 1916 and elected officers, including Bigelow as field secretary. It was an office he would hold for decades. The stated purpose of the Association was "the connection of Southern California and Salt Lake City by the most direct route, the furtherance of the good roads cause and the securing of desirable publicity for this vicinity." Bigelow told the group that his connections with the Hearst newspapers, especially the Los Angeles Examiner, could help with publicity. "Mr. Bigelow stated that 15,000 tourist cars visit Salt Lake

³³ Salt Lake Telegram, "Angelino Boosts Arrowhead Trail to Salt Lake," 6/4/1916, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com.

³⁴ Salt Lake Telegram, "Arrowhead Route Men Reach Zion," 7/26/1916, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com.

³⁵ Washington County News, "Biglow [sic] Returns in Arrowhead Scout Car," 8/3/1916, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com.

³⁶ Salt Lake Telegram, "Arrowhead Route Men Reach Zion," 7/26/1916, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com.

City annually and that most of these will certainly follow the new and shorter road which is proposed, and so be diverted to Redlands and vicinity.”³⁷

Bigelow and White also started a new magazine called Arrowhead, the official magazine of the Salt Lake Route and together they blanketed western newspapers with the somewhat self-serving announcement that Salt Lake and Utah were being featured in a national magazine.³⁸ He was establishing himself as the expert on western roads, especially the Arrowhead Trail, and people were flocking to join him.

His third overland auto party of 1916 arrived in Salt Lake under Bigelow’s leadership on October 4, 1916 and the group of 14 - including a few ladies - stayed at the Hotel Utah. The group was honored guests of Chambers of Commerce and Rotary Clubs along the route in Utah where they often quote the tagline that the scenic beauties of southern Utah are as “two Yosemites rolled in one”. “The party was on the road five days and organized sixteen chapters (of the Arrowhead Trail Association) in as many towns, with a total membership of 1,500...Much money has been pledged, and more will be secured to do the necessary road work that this route may be passable at all seasons for motorists.”³⁹

As the publicity onslaught intensified, would-be tourists in the west began to identify the Arrowhead Trail as the best and most scenic route, due to the tireless promotions of Bigelow and his crowd. Local towns started to notice more strangers traveling through their communities. In Washington County it was noteworthy to the local paper that, during one week in 1916, a record number of “seven autos from northern points have passed through bound for the coast” and spirits were high as to the increasing number of tourists.⁴⁰ But just a few months later, in June, 1917, more than 199 autos traveled the Arrowhead Highway in one month and the newspaper declared it “a real artery of travel by autoists.”⁴¹

As with any good promotion, Bigelow’s work began to feed on itself. A December 13, 1916 article in the Parowan Times is a good example:

“A series of interesting stories relating to the Arrowhead Trail is now appearing in the Sunday papers of California written by Douglas White, C.H. Bigelow, and F.V. Owens. A pictorial map will be a feature in the near future and scenic views in colors are in preparation for a front page story. The first of the series appeared in the Los Angeles Examiner, Los Angeles Times, Redlands

³⁷ Millard County Chronicle, “Arrowhead Trail is Discussed at Luncheon,” 7/20/1916, identified as reprint from Redlands, California newspaper, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com

³⁸ Salt Lake Telegram, “Salt Lake Featured in Current Magazine,” 9/6/1916, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com

³⁹ Salt Lake Herald, “Arrowhead Trail Visitors Are Dined,” 10/4/1916, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com

⁴⁰ Washington County News, “The Arrowhead Trail,” 11/30/1916, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com

⁴¹ Washington County News, “Arrowhead Trail 199 Autos in May,” 6/14/1917, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com

Review, and Colton Courier of Sunday, November 26, 1916, the second installment appearing Sunday, December 3.”⁴²

The Salt Lake Tribune participated in this 1916 publicity push, devoting a full page spread with four large Zion photographs to the article “Arrowhead Trail is Attractive from Scenic Viewpoint” on December 17, 1916. But the scenery wasn’t all the article featured. The author stated “federal aid [is] necessary” and explained that much work still needed to be done to connect up the various threads of improved roadways in the state. Praise was also heaped upon Charles Bigelow:

“It required an individual of extensive desert and mountain road experience to originally map out this Arrowhead Trail and when Charles Bigelow took to the route with his Oldsmobile scout car there were a few doubters that possessed little hope that this pioneer of western highways would succeed in laying out a feasible route...anyhow Bigelow finally succeeded in getting the entire roadway mapped out.”⁴³

He capped off his first big publicity tour with a flashy, patriotic accomplishment at the height of World War One when he set a record for road travel between Los Angeles and Salt Lake City in an Oldsmobile 8 as a “military” run: “The run was made under strict military rules for the purpose of demonstrating feasibility of the Arrowhead Trail.”⁴⁴ Bigelow and Army Captain Owen E. Bird co-piloted the car to demonstrate cars might work as well as trains to move troops overland:

“Making the trip from Los Angeles to Salt Lake in thirty-six hours and fourteen minutes’ actual running time in an effort to determine how long it would take a scouting party of the United States Army to reach this city...in the event of the railroads and telegraphs were placed out of commission, a section of the motoring division of the regular army, under command of Captain O.E. Bird, broke all records on the trip.”⁴⁵

The dramatic June 3, 1917 effort captured imagination of the public just as Americans were being drafted to fight a world war:

“When a mud bespattered motor car pulled up in front of the Newhouse Hotel shortly before midnight Tuesday night and four khaki-clad soldiers

⁴² Parowan Times, “Interesting Stories of Arrowhead Trail, 12/13/1916, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com

⁴³ Salt Lake Tribune, “Arrowhead Trail is Attractive from a Scenic Viewpoint,” 12/17/16, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com

⁴⁴ Las Vegas Age, “Fast Trip of Oldsmobile, Run Made by Bigelow and Army Officers Causes Interest,” 6/16/1917, www.digital.lvccld.org

⁴⁵ Ibid.

climbed stiffly from the seats and stretched their weary limbs for the first times in many hours, all previous records over the Arrowhead Trail were eclipsed.”⁴⁶.

Bigelow was enthusiastic about the trip, describing it in glowing terms to the Salt Lake Tribune:

“It was one of the most thoroughly organized and successfully consummated trips I ever participated in or witnessed...The Oldsmobile behaved beautifully. It is my own car and I have driven it on some desperately hard drives...I used this car all last summer in mapping roads. The Olds-8 has carried me through 38,000 miles without a single parts replacement or as much as a new steering knuckle or chassis bearing...I do not believe that we could have even approached the record that we made on any other route except the Arrowhead Trail...”⁴⁷

By the summer of 1917, Bigelow’s partner, Douglas White, traveled to Zion with journalist Jack Lait, who promised to write promotional articles on Utah tourism for Collier’s Weekly, The Saturday Evening Post, and The Chicago Tribune to be read “by millions of people.”⁴⁸



⁴⁶ Salt Lake Tribune, “Military Scouting Party Hangs Up Important Record, Finds Heavy Roads Between Los Angeles and Salt Lake,” 6/3/1917, Charles Bigelow Scrapbook.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Washington County News, “Douglas White and Jack Lait Visit Zion Canyon,” 8/22/1917, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com

The Salt Lake Tribune.
MINES & AUTOMOBILE SECTION

SALT LAKE CITY, SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 3, 1917.

**ARROWHEAD TRAIL
 RECORDS SMASHED**

**Military Car Makes Journey
 in Rain; Time 36 Hours
 14 Minutes.**

MUD FOR MANY MILES

**Accomplishes Purpose of
 Finding Actual Running
 Time for Military Use.**

When a mud bespattered motor car pulled up in front of the Newhouse hotel shortly before midnight Tuesday night and four khaki-clad soldiers climbed stiffly from the seats and stretched their weary limbs for the first time in many hours, all previous records over the Arrowhead trail between Salt Lake and Los Angeles were eclipsed and the new time of 36 hours and 14 minutes hung up for the road "speedsters" to shoot at. Curious persons who crowded around the machine and showered hundreds of questions upon the weary lads could scarcely believe that an automobile could possibly plow through the wet and muddy roads in the face of the unreasonable weather conditions throughout the western country.

Accomplishes Purpose.

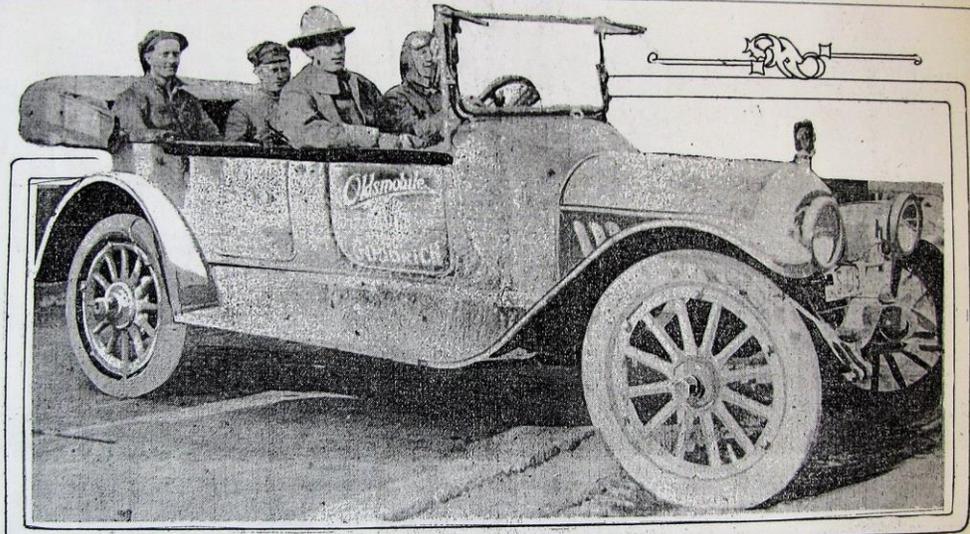
Besides establishing a record that is likely to stand for years over the trail is heavy rain, the party, headed by Captain Owen R. Bird, United States army motor division, accomplished the very thing that they had started out to do—to find the actual running time between the two cities over bad roads. This data is important, as the automobile would be chosen should the railroads be put out of commission during war times. Probably the party could not have chosen a better time for the trip to accomplish their purpose, for nearly every hour while the car plowed along they were battered with thunderstorms, hailstorms and windstorms which beat into their faces and made driving difficult and slow.

With Captain Bird in the Oldsmobile Eight, which made the record, were C. H. Bigelow, racing driver; Harold J. Baker, first sergeant in the motor reserve division; and Roy Hamilton, mechanic. Regarding the trip, Captain Bird said before leaving:

Stock Car Used.

In the first place it was necessary to choose a motor car of strictly stock model, due to the fact that this type would be used in case of necessity. No time could be spared in selecting others. Next it was necessary to fill it to capacity, four passengers, as this is the number which is generally used in a motor patrol party. The Oldsmobile was chosen owing to its ruggedness and ability to withstand hard knocks. It is now an accepted fact that the motor car will be called upon if railroads and telegraph lines are out of condition in war times. Cavalry is fast waning, and, in fact, the horse is passing from the army. The motor car can be overworked. It can travel twenty-four hours a day, if necessary. It requires little attention when compared with

**MILITARY SCOUTING PARTY HANGS UP IMPORTANT RECORD
 FINDS HEAVY ROADS BETWEEN LOS ANGELES AND SALT LAKE**



**OLDSMOBILE EIGHT IN WHICH THE RECORD WAS MADE
 AND ARMY PARTY TESTING OUT BEFORE THE RETURN TRIP**



CAPT. OWEN R. BIRD



ROY HAMILTON



G. H. BIGELOW



"RED"

EARLY 20th CENTURY ROAD BUILDING IN UTAH

Timing couldn't have been better for Bigelow's road promotion initiative. Utah was accelerating its road construction projects during the early 1900s, putting an effective State Road Commission in place and appropriating public money to supplement the forced labor being used to improve local roads. (As late as 1919 Utah's poll tax required all able-bodied men to devote at least two working days per year to road construction projects.)⁴⁹

"By 1908 the pressure of the automobile owner in Utah for better roads had broken through, the hour had indeed struck," observed highway historian Ezra Knowlton.⁵⁰ The first state road appropriation of \$27,000 was made and Washington County even received a small amount for the Arrowhead trail near Santa Clara.

In January 14, 1909, with more than 300,000 cars on the road in America, Utah held its first Good Roads convention in Salt Lake City. The meeting was hosted by Governor Spry and 400 delegates attended. The momentum carried over into the state legislature, where they promptly passed a bill forming a Road Commission to designate and fund official roads. Washington County was the first county to submit its official map and request designation of the road that would become the Arrowhead Highway.⁵¹ The Road Commission approved a project that relocated the highway along Santa Clara Creek so drivers did not have to cross it sixteen times in five miles.

A second Utah Good Roads convention followed in January 1910 with similarly enthusiastic results, and Governor Spry led the charge. The delegates even urged the state leaders to get involved in the interstate movement to build routes across the west.⁵² State road appropriations grew to \$67,000, divided equally among the counties. By the end of the year more than 500 miles of improved roads existed across the state, though little of it was paved.⁵³ During 1911-1913, Utah's governor even sent crews of state prison inmates to Washington County to build roads, especially the difficult projects over Black Ridge.⁵⁴

With all the attention being paid to Utah roads construction, it is important to remember that state roads weren't exactly crowded with traffic. In 1911, only 1,491 cars

⁴⁹ Laws of Utah (1919), Chap. 83, "Poll Tax," act repealing Title 86, Secs. 4465 through 4469, inclusive, Compiled Laws of Utah, 1917.

⁵⁰ Ezra C. Knowlton, History of Highway Development in Utah, 1960.

⁵¹ Knowlton at 143. The Road Commission established required each of then-27 counties to furnish an official county map showing the existing roads. It was required to be on tracing linen in India ink and to show the roads by different categories and colors.

⁵² Knowlton at 127-130.

⁵³ Knowlton at 149-150.

⁵⁴ Knowlton at 198.

were registered in Utah.⁵⁵ One 24-hour traffic count in 1915 on the road from Salt Lake to Davis County found a total of 287 automobiles, compared to 256 wagons and 37 men on horses.⁵⁶

Then again, there were only 36.59 miles of concrete pavement in all of Utah in 1916, and none of it was south of Sanpete County. Although the first Federal Highway Act passed in 1916, the law gave little to Utah in terms of aid. By 1916, car ownership in America skyrocketed to 3,367,889 and the demand was far outpacing the roads available for travel.⁵⁷ Bigelow was the right man at the right time for promotion of the Arrowhead Highway.

He helped organize several “Good Roads Day” events in the state, most successfully in Washington County, which resulted in impressive number of citizens turning out with their own teams, wagons, and shovels to build the Arrowhead Highway. At the October 27, 1916 Good Roads Day, all stores were closed and the towns observed a holiday to allow everyone to work on the road. Bigelow and the community recruited students from nearby Dixie College to perform road work as a service project and it blossomed into an oft-reprinted newspaper story.⁵⁸

He also arranged for a “moving picture operator and outfit on the ground” to make a movie that would be shown all over the country.⁵⁹ Forty teams worked on the road between St. George and Santa Clara:

“Everybody had the spirit for among the workers were bankers, lawyers, doctors and others unused to hard outdoor work but they all pitched in until they were tired out.”⁶⁰

The next Good Roads Day on February 10, 1917 was an even bigger success, with 247 men and 56 teams from St. George working on their end of the road, and 107 men and 30 teams from Santa Clara working on theirs. The two teams met in the middle to enjoy a feast provided by the ladies of both towns:

““The Relief Societies...arranged for dinner for the workers and members of these societies were taken out with the food...Wagon covers were spread upon

⁵⁵ The Indianapolis Star, “U.S. Auto Directory,” 5/28/1911, www.newspapers.com, 9/6/2018.

⁵⁶ Knowlton at 159.

⁵⁷ State Motor Vehicle Registrations by Years 1900-1995, www.fhwa.dot.gov, 9/6/2018.

⁵⁸ Washington County News, “Dixie Normal College Road Making Day,” 12/14/1916, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com, “When the students of the Dixie Normal College at St George Utah made October 27 a road-making day and took a section of the Arrowhead Trail out of the Santa Clara creek bed and put it on high ground they literally put St. George on the world’s map. The story has been printed in magazines and newspapers everywhere...”

⁵⁹ Washington County News, “Big Road Day – Dixie’s Opportunity,” 10/26/1916, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com.

⁶⁰ Washington County News, “Something About the Arrowhead Trail,” C.H. Bigelow, 11/23/1916, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com.

the ground on which snow white tablecloths were spread upon which the food was laid...after all had eaten there was enough left to have fed a similar sized crowd. There were chickens (we did not know there were so many in St. George) in abundance, ham, roast beef, cheese, potato salad, baked beans, sweet pickles, etc. etc. and cake in great abundance and variety.”⁶¹

Bigelow’s genius for promotion motivated communities to take charge of their own transportation destiny. At three more 1917 Good Roads Days there were “men between 70 and 80 years old and boys from 14 years old upward” working alongside “men in their prime” and 18 Shivwits Indians joined them. A Salt Lake group of Rotary Club members praised St. George as “the most enthusiastic and conscientious road building community in the United States.”⁶²

Bigelow used the newly-popular film industry to spur interest in roads. In October, 1916 he showed a film at the St. George Electric Theater that featured Zion Canyon⁶³, and in August, 1917 his partner, Doug White, showed “a 1000 foot film of Zion Canyon” on the same screen. It was later sent to theaters in Hurricane, Cedar City, Parowan, Beaver, Milford, and Fillmore along the Arrowhead Highway.⁶⁴

NATIONAL PARKS SPUR TOURISM

Another fortuitous event in Bigelow’s campaign to bring automobile tourists to Utah was the creation of Zion National Park. The area was designated a national monument (Mukuntuweap) on July 31, 1909, but when Horace Albright, assistant head of the National Park Service visited in 1917 he decided to expand and rename it. Utah leaders such as Heber J. Grant were enthusiastic about the proposal, so Utah Senator Reed Smoot asked Congress for \$15,000 to improve the road to Zion. Edwin Higbee and his road crew from nearby Toquerville built the road over the next few seasons and Zion National Park was officially rededicated in 1920.⁶⁵

Bigelow was rapturous in his praise for “Little Zion” – as it was nicknamed – and he used some of his most purple prose when describing it in news articles:

61 Washington County News, “Great Turnout Good Road Day,” 2/15/1917, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com.

62 Washington County News, “Arrowhead Trails Sec’y Boosts Dixie,” 3/1/1917, reprinted from Salt Lake Herald Republican, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com.

63 Washington County News, “Arrowhead Trails Field Secretary Here,” 10/19/1916, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com.

64 Washington County News, “Douglas White and Jack Lait Visit Zion Canyon,” 8/22/1917, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com.

⁶⁵ Tiffany Taylor, “Zion National Park,” Arcadia Publishing, 2008, 64-68.

“Sandstone hills sculptured by the winds and rains, grassy leas walled by colored ledges – visions that amaze and delight the eye were visited recently by an Examiner party in a Chandler Royal 8-75 Sedan.”⁶⁶

Visitors flocked to Zion right from the beginning, with 3,692 coming in 1920 and that number growing exponentially every year thereafter. By 1930 the park attracted 55,297 visitors annually; it doubled to six figures by the middle of the 1930s.⁶⁷ This is astounding when considering the entire population of nearby Washington County was only 7,420 in 1930.⁶⁸ Most visitors came by way of the Arrowhead Highway or the Union Pacific Railroad, which stopped in Cedar City by 1922.

Bryce Canyon was a similar magnet for tourism after its dedication in 1928. It attracted 35,982 visitors in 1930, but skyrocketed past 100,000 visitors annually by the 1940s.⁶⁹ Both of these parks helped Bigelow in many ways to attract national attention and federal money to his road-building campaign. The extensive advertising done by the Union Pacific Railroad, which invested heavily in Utah’s national parks, dovetailed with Bigelow’s own newspaper articles. His requests for road funding were boosted when a more substantial federal highway appropriation came to Utah in 1921 as the law changed to give extra money to states with public lands.⁷⁰ In 1923 the Utah Legislature levied its first gasoline tax and the pot of road funding increased even more.⁷¹



⁶⁶ Los Angeles Examiner, “Atop Zion National Park,” 9/2/1928, Charles Bigelow scrapbook.

⁶⁷ Annual Summary Report, National Park Visitors (1904-present), [www.//irma.nps.gov/Stats](http://irma.nps.gov/Stats), accessed 9/1/2018.

⁶⁸ U.S. Decennial Census, www.wikipedia.org, Washington County, Utah.

⁶⁹ Annual Summary Report, National Park Visitors (1904-present), [www.//irma.nps.gov/Stats](http://irma.nps.gov/Stats), accessed 9/1/2018.

⁷⁰ Knowlton at 163.

⁷¹ Knowlton at 232.



BIGELOW'S PLAN WORKS

All in all, it was a perfect storm with Bigelow at the center, writing articles, hosting cross-country tours, and speaking at every Chamber of Commerce and Rotary luncheon he could find to promote the Arrowhead Highway. His name appears in western newspapers virtually every month from 1916 into the late 1920s. For example, a search of the Las Vegas Age shows Bigelow and his wife staying at the New Overland Hotel in Las Vegas on September 8, 15, and October 20, 1917, January 26, 1918, February 9, 1918, March 2, 1918, May 4, 1918 and May 18, 1918.⁷²

He attended a conference in Las Vegas during February, 1920 where members of the Nevada Highway Commission, the Utah Highway Commission, and the Automobile Club of Southern California joined forces to seek federal funding for Arrowhead Trail road improvement. Bigelow addressed the group, telling them about the "one bad link" remaining on the road through the Shivwits Indian Reservation and

⁷² Las Vegas Age, 1917, 1918, www.digital.lvcclld.org

asking them to repair it.⁷³ In some news accounts Bigelow is identified as an “assistant state engineer of Utah”. In a February 12, 1921 article Bigelow is scouting sites for the Boulder Canyon Dam roads and reports that tourists may soon be able to visit the dam site “if he is willing to deflate his tires and fight high centers and rocks on 15 percent grades.”⁷⁴

The newspaper articles Bigelow wrote about his exploits were carried in many different western papers, including well-known dailies such as The Los Angeles Times, The Los Angeles Examiner, The Salt Lake Tribune, The San Francisco Examiner, and The Arizona Republic. He is also frequently mentioned in small weekly papers as he appears in each community to report on road conditions. Some local newspaper editors knew him so well they had a little fun with him and his dogged reputation for road promotion:

“Charles Bigelow is known as the father of the Arrowhead Trail and a right generous, hustling old dad he is, to be sure. He has been working almost constantly for the youngster for the past four or five years, or since its incipency, and will soon have accumulated for it a competency!”⁷⁵

Bigelow continued to set speed records across western roads, driving from Salt Lake to San Francisco across the Lincoln Highway in a Reo in July, 1923. As usual he was accompanied by a newspaper reporter and an executive from Reo car company to insure plenty of publicity. Bigelow is described as “civil engineer, trail maker, road expert” in the coverage.⁷⁶

His own writing in a 1926 newspaper demonstrates the enthusiasm and imagery of Charles Bigelow’s journalism:

“To the west of the tilled area great billows of land, black, gray and red, rise higher and higher in apparent attempt to submerge the towering jagged summits of the Pine Valley Mountains. A hard inhospitable land in its untamed reaches; soft, sensuous, alluring, pulsing with peace and contentment wherever man has marshaled to his aid that primordial enemy of the desert – water. ..The motoring traveler sensing that land over yonder feeling the primeval call of the unknown unexplored, forgets his duties and business claims and achieves a god-like contempt for fleeting time. Hypnotized by the prodigality of sculptured canyons, or bold faced towering cliffs mere man’s efforts and achievements are

⁷³ Las Vegas Age, 2/28/1920, www.digital.lvcclld.org

⁷⁴ Las Vegas Age, 2/12/1921, www.digital.lvcclld.org

⁷⁵ Iron County Record, “Arrowhead Trail Makes Headway,” 4/25/1919, Charles Bigelow Scrapbook.

⁷⁶ San Francisco Examiner, “Record Broken to Salt Lake,” 7/8/1923, Charles Bigelow Scrapbook.

forgotten.” “The motor car has brought this wonderland out of the realm of vague rumors into the world of actualities.”⁷⁷

He himself described his message as “the gospel of good roads” and he approached his thirty-year road promotion career with the energy of a born-again minister. Bigelow made friends wherever he went, especially with the community leaders, car company executives, newspaper editors, and hotel operators.⁷⁸

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s more than 100 articles appeared under his byline or quoting him about western roads and tourism. He spoke to groups and encouraged road funding well into the Depression era. He wrote proudly in 1928 about the success of his road promotion efforts and the tourists now flooding into Utah:

“In 1916 a handful of LA citizens cooperating with a like small number of Utah residents headed by Governor William Spry decided that it was high time a motor highway should be opened connecting Los Angeles with Salt Lake City... About the same time a travelable road was opened connecting the city of the saints with the city of the angels... The opening of the Arrowhead Trail thus making the intermountain national parks easily accessible to the motorist was brought about almost entirely by private interests and individuals. Especially is this true of the advertising angle. Time and again, the motor car dealers of Los Angeles have gallantly responded in exploitation of our neighbor states, their resources and attractions.”⁷⁹

As road funding and construction became more routinely supported, Bigelow rested a bit on his laurels. The Utah route known as the Arrowhead Trail or Arrowhead Highway was renamed U.S. Highway 91 in April, 1927.⁸⁰ The striking blue and white Arrowhead emblem signs were taken down and retired in favor of the official numbered highway signs, but the road lost none of its popularity. In 1929, the Arrowhead Trails Association reorganized itself around promotion of the St. George road to Kingman, Arizona and a road to the Boulder Dam construction site, with Bigelow still leading the charge.⁸¹ He shows up in southern Utah at community

⁷⁷ The Iron County Record, “Christen Rock Cathedral Mountain at the Mount of Zion National Park in Southern Utah,” 11/26/1926, reprinted from the Los Angeles Express, Charles Bigelow Scrapbook.

⁷⁸ St. George Rotary leader Andrew O. McArthur (1913-2005) is one such community member who noted in an interview that he remembered when Bigelow “worked with Salt Lake City and Los Angeles to perfect a road through...it was called the Arrowhead Trail.” Oral History of Andrew McArthur, 95-005, Dixie State University Special Collections, pgs. 8-10.

⁷⁹ Los Angeles Evening Herald, “Highways to Utah National Park Are Being Improved,” 9/19/1928, Charles Bigelow Scrapbook.

⁸⁰ Knowlton at 258.

⁸¹ Washington County News, “Reorganization of Arrowhead Trail Ass’n.” 11/13/1929, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com

meetings at least until 1938 when he is campaigning for the St. George-Kingman road.⁸² But Bigelow had already accomplished what he set out to do – the Arrowhead Highway route was entirely paved and oiled from the Idaho state line to Los Angeles by 1932.⁸³

Bigelow continued to write articles promoting other western areas such as the Grand Canyon and Kaibab Forest in Arizona.⁸⁴ He touted the beauties of Hoover Dam and traveled across the Apache Trail.⁸⁵ When the Depression threatened to discourage tourism in 1932, Bigelow wrote a rousing call to action, predicting that 200,000 tourists would visit Utah that year:

“The many distressing financial happenings of 1932 have given many of us a wrong slant at the future. We are too prone to come despairing...It is not unreasonable to believe that if we energetically advertise the vacation and scenic resources of Southern Utah, that we can at least double the number of motorists that visited us last year. Is this business worth anything to you?”⁸⁶

Bigelow’s indefatigable spirit and belief in Utah’s attractions carried him through even the tough times.

BIGELOW’S LIFE AND LEGACY

As he entered his sixties, Bigelow’s news articles dwindled. In 1930, he and his wife Hattie were living in southern California in a home they owned at 4858 Lincoln Street in Los Angeles. In the 1930 U.S. Census he values his home at \$3,500.00. He describes himself as an “advertising man – promotion of Good Roads” and lists Hattie as a saleslady in a department store.⁸⁷ In the 1940 U.S. Census Hattie is still living at the same address, but she is listed as the head of household and there is no mention of Charles, who may have been spending most of his time in St. George.

The editor of The Beaver Press in Beaver, Utah wrote a vivid profile of Bigelow in 1918:

82 Washington County News, “Chamber Considers St. George-Kingman Road,” 10/20/1938, see also 10/18/1934, 6/27/1935, 3/19/1936, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com.

83 Iron County Record, “Bids Called for Construction of New Highway,” 9/15/1932, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com

84 Los Angeles Times, “Vast herds of Deer in Kaibab Forest in Arizona and Utah Offer Keen Sport to Local Hunters,” 10/4/1931, Charles Bigelow Scrapbook; Los Angeles Times, “Ceremonies Friday Dedicate Grand Canyon Highway Bridge,” 6/9/1929, Charles Bigelow Scrapbook.

85 Los Angeles Times, “Huge Stone Bridge Over Gorge Awe Inspiring,” 6/19/1932, Charles Bigelow Scrapbook; Hollywood Citizen, “Pennzoil’s Test Truck Crew Scouts Along Apache Trail,” 2/3/1932, Charles Bigelow Scrapbook.

86 The Beaver Press, “200,000 Tourists to Visit This State Enroute to Calif.,” 4/22/1932, www.newspapers.com.

87 U.S. Census 1930, www.familysearch.org.

“Did you ever meet Charley Bigelow – that little short cripple who gets around as awkward as a goose on land? But say! Put him behind the wheel of his old automobile, and he is about as graceful as that same old goose is on the water – perfectly at home. Well, we have known Charley for the past ten or twelve years... We met him again Saturday night in the Arrowhead Hotel in St. George, and say, some of the lies we told each other would hardly do to print here. Charley is down there, boosting as usual; boosting is his business, and always road boosting at that... It is safe to say that he has pioneered more roads – desert roads – than any other man; has lived among and along them more, and loves them better than any other man. The rougher the road, the harder the road, the better he liked it... When we asked him the other night when he was going back to Los Angeles, he said with a sigh: ‘I never want to see that country again, the roads are too good.’”⁸⁸

A few reports mention that Bigelow’s leg was disabled, possibly as a result of a car wreck, but it didn’t seem to slow him down. Another recollection comes from Howard Pulsipher, who owned a car repair garage along the Arrowhead Highway in Mesquite, Nevada from 1924 to 1948. He would have known Bigelow as an older man in his 50s or 60s:

“Here I would like to pause and give credit to the poor old man with only one leg who did more to establish that highway than all the officials. At his own expense and all alone would leave Salt Lake in his old Ford or Chevrolet with cans of gasoline – canteens – tire patching – fan belts – oil – springs – and everything to bounce over the rocks and thru sand and mud holes. He would contact anybody along the way whom he thought would help make a bridge across a wash haul some straw or gravel and clay in a deep sand bed – clean out some big rocks and steep hill. He was always trying to get town boards and county commissioners to help. He would work his way to Los Angeles then come back doing the same. To my knowledge he never asked for personal help but I always serviced his car and tried to fit him out for his tedious task. This was not just once but he kept it up for three or four years. Before he stopped the road was greatly improved and changed name to US 91. The gentleman’s name was Bieglow [sic] He went by ‘Peg Leg’.”⁸⁹

St. George mining attorney Ralph Hafen, being interviewed for his own life story, remembered Charles Bigelow as working in the local oil boom of the 1930s:

⁸⁸ The Beaver Press, “Charles H. Bigelow, The Desert Rat”, article reprinted in the Washington County News, 3/28/1918, www.utahdigitalnewspapers.com

⁸⁹ “The Writings of Howard Pulsipher”, 1900-1990, August 1923 entry, pgs. 57-60, Virgin Valley Museum, www.mesquitenv.pastperfectonline.com, accessed 9/11/2018. Pulsipher wrote these memories in diary form over time and they were apparently transcribed by his family members.

“[Bigelow] got into promotion, in his later life when he was an elderly man, of oil and gas. He was a great promoter, and that’s how he got to be friends with the Picketts...That was that phase of his career, because I used to meet him when he had ore samples. One time he was carrying his bag and he cautioned Evan Pickett. He said, ‘Be careful of that bag, boy. It’s full of gold.’ So he was also in the oil business.”⁹⁰

It is possible that Bigelow turned his talents to oil and gas development once the roads effort ebbed. Ellis Pickett of St. George was a principal in the Arrowhead Petroleum Corporation, formed in 1927 and actively developing local oil wells until a tragic oil well explosion in 1935 dampened enthusiasm for that industry.⁹¹ Bigelow maintained close ties to southern Utah and may have been associated with this effort.

These few firsthand accounts of Bigelow’s personality reinforce the image of a dedicated, charming, and knowledgeable promoter, in the best sense. Bigelow believed in himself and in his crusade for good roads. He was determined to the end, as scholar Leo Lyman notes in regard to Pulsipher’s portrait:

“This is evidence that the irrepressible locator and leading promoter of the road stayed with what must have become an obsession long after he faded from the official limelight and newspaper coverage he had been so adept at garnering for his earlier efforts. It is further indication such a man should not be forgotten by the myriads of travelers who continuously utilize his highway – whatever its name.”⁹²

Bigelow envisioned a grand future where lives were improved due to better ways of car travel. He wrote boldly that “before the sweep of the modern highway, frontiers fall – marking the beginning of new cycles in human endeavor thus to enrich the world.”⁹³ He was convinced he was part of a movement that was advertising southwestern Utah “in every civilized country of the globe.”⁹⁴ His love of St. George and its surroundings is evidenced by his decision that he and Hattie would be buried in

⁹⁰ Oral History Interview with Ralph J. Hafen, December 26, 1995, Item 95-015, Dixie State University Special Collections, p. 7. Hafen (1925-2012) mentions having inherited Bigelow’s scrapbook and wanting to write Bigelow’s life story, but it is not clear he ever completed that project.

⁹¹ The oil well boom of the 1930s near St. George is well-documented on the website of the Washington County Utah Historical Society at www.wchs.org/businesses/arrowhead-petroleum-corporation.php

⁹² Edward Leo Lyman, *Southern California Quarterly*, Volume LXXXI No. 3, Fall 1999, p. 340.

⁹³ *Los Angeles Evening Express*, “Scenic Drive Over Arrowhead Trail Leads Motor Party to National Park,” by C.H. Bigelow, 5/27/1931, p. 26 of Charles Bigelow Scrapbook.

⁹⁴ *Los Angeles Examiner*, “Tour to Ancient Vermillion Cliff Dwellings – an Examiner Monologue”, by C.H. Bigelow, 8/16/1925, Charles Bigelow Scrapbook.

the St. George City Cemetery. He died June 8, 1958.⁹⁵ It is fitting that he would rest where he did so much of his life's work.

It is tempting to define Bigelow's legacy in terms of numbers, such as road miles completed, or population growth along his beloved Arrowhead Trail, or tourism figures which grew to include millions of annual visitors to Utah's national parks. But there is also the profound value of Bigelow helping to discover a unique, hidden landscape and bringing others to experience that with him. The roads he explored and helped build outlasted him, as did the effects of bringing people to this remote area of the country. Tourism opened up the west and energized development, for good or bad. In that sense, Charles Bigelow's influence is magnified by every visitor and road tripper who comes after him. We are still following his tail lights over the next red sandstone hill.



⁹⁵ Bigelow is buried in Block 29, Lot 30, Plot 2, Plat C, St. George City Cemetery, St. George, Utah, www.utahcemeteries.org