

Colchester Gingko Tree

The large old Gingko tree located on South Main Street in front of the CVS parking lot has a long and interesting history. Some residents refer to it as the “ugly” tree, some love it and still others never notice it. It has stood in that spot for over a century and it’s survived the growth of Colchester, and changes that have happened around it.

The house that the tree stood in front of was owned by Elizabeth E Bigelow, born 1858, great-granddaughter of Col. Guy Bigelow. The Bigelow Family ancestry dates back to Lieutenant John Bigelow who first came to Colchester in 1709. They were farmers and over the years became an important and influential family in Colchester history.

In the 1920 census, Elizabeth is listed as owner of the home and occupation as Gardener. She was known though out the area for her beautiful gardens that had unusual specimens. She was also very involved in town issues, belonging to the Bacon Academy Trustees and the Colchester Chapter of Daughters of America Revolution. She would hold lavish garden parties in her gardens to benefit these causes.

Gingko trees are not native to America and were import at the time from Asia. She may have acquired the tree from another family member that traveled extensively. She had a cousin, William Sturgis Bigelow that lived and traveled in Japan for seven years. He returned bring back many pieces of fine art and maybe several plant specimens. He may have gifted the gingko tree to his cousin for her gardens. He came back to Boston from his travels in Japan in 1889. It is estimated that she planted the tree at that time.

The Colchester gingko tree has survived may changes, brought about by the growing commercial needs of the town. In the 1960’s the three houses that stood where the CVS parking lot is now, were destroyed to make room for a grocery store. The historical 1800 houses and Miss Bigelow’s gardens were lost, but Colchester citizens rallied around the Gingko tree to save it. These events may have been the catalyst for the founding of the Colchester Historical Society.

Efforts are underway to get the Ginkgo tree listed as a historical and notable tree in Connecticut. It is now on property owned by the state and its care and maintenance is in question. The Conn. College Arboretum keeps the list of the States notable trees.

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