The Keller Automobile

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Elizabeth Dale-Gibbons-Flanagan-Jeffries-High-Brown-Routt Research Project

Elizabeth Dale-Gibbons-Flanagan-Jeffries-High-Brown-Routt is known as “The Black Widow of Hazel Green.” She is more commonly known as Elizabeth Dale.

Elizabeth Evans Dale was born in 1797 to her father and her mother, Adam Dale and Elizabeth Evans. She was described as “a beautiful and charming woman, with auburn hair, dark brown eyes and fair complexion. She was well educated, an aristocrat and had in her veins the blue blood of men who had followed in the steps of Lord Baltimore and Cecil Calvert. She loved fine clothes, fine horses, fine furnishings and all conveniences made possible by the considerable wealth of her family. Her appeal to men was unusual” (Virgil Carrington Jones 22).

For convenience, she will be referred to as Elizabeth Dale. Elizabeth Dale’s first husband was Reverend Samuel G. Gibbons. They got married in the year 1812, when Elizabeth was only 14 years old. Soon after Elizabeth and Reverend Gibbons got married, they moved with Elizabeth’s parents to Columbia, Tennessee. In 1816, Reverend Gibbons wrote and filed his will at the age of 23 years old. He signed away his assets and possessions to Elizabeth. Reverend Gibbons died 18 years after his marriage to Elizabeth, making it Elizabeth’s longest marriage and the first of many.

Elizabeth Dale’s second husband was Mr. Philip Flanagan. They wed in October of 1831, approximately eleven years after the death of Reverend Gibbons. He died roughly five months
later in 1832 of an unrecorded cause. Interestingly, it is recorded that Mr. Flanagan owned a carriage-making business and was deeply in debt. This fact was only discovered later by historians viewing the accounts of his business. She married her third husband in 1833 and remained with him for five years. Mr. Alexander Jefferies was a plantation owner, and his property would later become home to the famous haunted house of Hazel Green because of his new bride. Jefferies and Elizabeth would have two children in their time together: a son and a daughter. Unfortunately, their daughter would die young at seven years old. Jefferies died in 1838, discovered dead on the property. His corpse was so severely swollen that it was decided he would need to be buried the very same day. He was laid to rest on the grounds of the plantation, and later his daughter would be buried next to him. Elizabeth Dale’s fourth husband was Robert A. High. The couple married in 1939, one year after the death of Jefferies. Together, they stayed on the plantation, which Elizabeth had since taken over. High was a former member of the Alabama state legislature and spent much time during their marriage traveling. Two years later, he died suddenly of an unrecorded cause. Her fifth marriage was to a man named Absolom Brown, roughly five years after the death of High in 1846. This marriage lasted approximately a year, just enough time for Brown to build the family a grand and lavish home on the property Elizabeth had inherited from her second marriage. Quickly after the completion of the home, though, Brown died suddenly in 1847. His body was allegedly so swollen following his death that he was buried that night in the darkness by Elizabeth Dale and several of her slaves. The only people to have ever seen his corpse were these slaves and Elizabeth Dale. The final husband was Mr. Willis Routt. Very little is known about this husband other than the fact that he married Elizabeth in 1848, one year after the death of Brown, and he died three years later in 1851 of an unrecorded cause.
Elizabeth Dale is most well known for her home in Hazel Green, Alabama. Alexander Jeffries, Elizabeth’s fourth husband, started the plantation where the home was built before meeting Elizabeth. Jeffries cleared the property and built a log house with 4 rooms. After Jeffries died, Elizabeth took over the plantation. The construction of her mansion did not begin until after Elizabeth married her fifth husband Absolom Brown. This mansion consisted of 4 large rooms on the top floor and 4 large rooms on the bottom floor. Two staircases connected the top and bottom floors and led to a front hall. Elizabeth Dale held many gatherings in this mansion. She filled the house with rich and lavish furniture. In 1855, Elizabeth Dale sold the mansion to Levi Donaldson. Also, her daughter and her fourth husband’s graves stayed at the property even after Elizabeth moved out. The mansion was later burned down by an arsonist in 1968.

The rumors concerning the case of Elizabeth Dale were scathing. These rumors emerged as early as the death of her second husband Mr. Jefferies. The children of Jefferies—from a previous marriage of the widower—allegedly blamed Elizabeth for the death of their father. However, the suspicious death of her fifth husband Absolom Brown only magnified these conversations. One rumor was that Elizabeth throughout her marriages kept a hat rack by the door to the home with hats from each of her previous husbands. A later rumor was the speculation that later conflicts involving Abner Tate all stemmed from the widow rejecting romantic advances from the man.

After the death of Elizabeth Dale’s sixth husband, Abner Tate accused and charged Elizabeth of murdering her husband. Abner Tate and Elizabeth Dale had prior controversies about her plantation and livestock since they were neighbors. In response to this charge, a possible suitor of Elizabeth Dale, D.H. Bingham, fired back at Tate. D.H. Bingham accused Tate of murder because Tate allegedly had a person from Kentucky die on his property. Thus, this led
Tate to write a book called *Defense of Abner Tate Against Charges of Murder Preferred by D. H. Bingham*. Quotes about Elizabeth from this book led her to file a $50,000 defamation lawsuit against Tate. The court record also shows that Elizabeth tried to sue Tate and Jacob H. Pierce for $1,400 because she believed “they owed her for her cotton crop,” which she later dropped (Jones 26). She was never convicted because the case dropped at the beginning of the civil war, and Elizabeth then sold the house and moved to Mississippi.

After Elizabeth sold her house in 1855, she moved with her son William A. Jeffries to Marshall County, Mississippi. In 1866, Elizabeth would die in Marshall County, Mississippi. The cause of death is unknown. Elizabeth Dale does not have a known gravestone. To this day, tales of her being a “husband-killing witch” are still told to children. There are ghost stories about “The Haunted House of Hazel Green” and “The ‘Black Widow’ of Hazel Green.”
Works Cited

Primary Source: “Depositions to Routt vs. Tate (12 of 14),” *The UAH Archives and Special Collections*, accessed September 27, 2022, http://libarchstor2.uah.edu/digitalcollections/items/show/7007.


