

SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF JOHN MIDDLETON
Utah Pioneer of 1856
Prepared by his son, Dr. George Middleton
Sept. 7, 1927
For Cedar City Camp, Cedar City, Utah

For more than twenty years I have been the oldest male representative of my father's household.

The information I have about our ancestry is fragmentary and disconnected, because the ones who could have told a consecutive story first hand are long since passed away. Thanks to the courtesy of my cousin, Mrs. Amy Webster Leigh, whose interesting review supplements my own memory of family traditions, I shall have material enough to exhaust all the time reasonable at my disposal.

The name Middleton had its origin about 1250 in the County of Kincardine, Scotland. A certain prominent citizen, on receiving the badge of peerage, was given the title of Earl of Middleton, and his descendants were called after his title. I shall pass lightly by Gilbert Middleton, who was said to be a robber knight in 1317. Remember the bad eggs don't count. General John Middleton mentioned in the famous diary of Samuel Pepys, was one of the Scotch Covenanters about 1650. There was also a Mrs. Middleton mentioned frequently by the Pepys diary as a famed beauty, but I lost interest in her when old Sam noted the fact that her feet smelled badly.

Many of the Middletons have been Physicians and Surgeons. Arthur Middleton was one of the signers of the American Declaration of Independence.

Of course we cannot trace direct descent to these people, but it is quite possible that all the Middletons came to a common converging point in the title bestowed in Kincardine County, Scotland in 1250.

Our particular branch of the Middleton tribe hales from Wyndham, Norfolk County England, as also did the Parsons who were maternal ancestors. We have in our possession a picture of my great great grandfather Middleton, who appears to be a dignified man of the English yeomanry, of the peasant type. You older people were all acquainted with my grandfather, William Middleton, who was one of picturesque characters of the elder Cedar.

Mrs. Leigh informs me that he was the grandson of the maternal side of John

Gann, and that his mother was a woman of initiative, and a high type lady. Grandfather William Middleton was a man without education, but with an aptness for ready repartee, which was quite refreshing. He was public spirited, and commonly occupied the position of chairman of the decorating committee of the town celebrations. One of the earliest recollections I have of him was his marrying a mace in the fourth of July procession, upon which were fastened the various cereals and vegetables and fruits to make up the staff of life. When it came his turn to give a toast he said:

" The man who carries the staff of life,
Had ought to have another wife."

He was justly noted for two things: his scrupulous honesty, and his inordinate capacity for work. Long before daylight in the threshing time, the neighbors could hear his flail in motion, and the dews of evening fell upon him while he yet bent over his unfinished task. Those were cruel hard days for the farmer, but Grandfather Middleton seemed to take delight in their severest ordeals.

In the London days he was porter for a railroad company, and I have it on the honor of himself and my father, that he used to carry sacks containing eight bushels of wheat without great difficulty.

Anent of his rhyming toast, he had a brother, or an uncle, or one near kin, who was given to versification. My father, who was unsophisticated in the mysteries of prosody brought home with him from England some the effusions of his poetic uncle, with the statement that they had been presented to the Queen. When I read these whapsodious lyrics, I said to myself, " God save the Queen." In London thirty years ago I found an old slumbering firebrand of the Middleton tribe, an uncle to Grandfather Middleton by the name of John, who with his wife Hannah Middleton was living in reduced circumstances in the festering environs of Whitechappel. He had been a lifeboat painter, and known better days. He was convivial, humorous, and companionable in spite of the poverty. From Uncle John and Aunt Hannah, I learned many interesting facts about my people that I had not known before. I learned the story of my father's mother, whom some of you older people yet remember. I understand she was a dignified, intellectual woman of the better class of English, and that the Parson family to whom she belonged were wealthy farmers, who were held in much respect

in Norfolk County. The hardships incident to Martin's tragic handcart company, and the unsatisfactory local situation here at that particular time broke her spirit, and she died young. The records show that the date of her departure was May 26, 1861, just five years from the time she left her native land.

Her daughter, Aunt Betsy Webster, was to me one of the most adorable women I ever knew. She it was who first recognized my struggles as a boy, and came to my aid with a full measure of sympathy. Her six years in the boarding schools of London added to the rudiments of the grammar schools which preceded them, gave her an education unusual for the times. Her handwriting was superb, and her language was that of the upper class of English. She was the true George Washington type, dignified, reserved, efficient, and loyal.

Before the days of ready made clothing, she did a tailoring business for the public, as a matter of accommodation and as a means of replenishing the family exchequer. Her sartorial aptness had its origin in the remodeling of an overcoat which she took to pieces and made into a new one by turning the cloth inside out. Everybody wondered how Brother Webster could afford a new overcoat in that straggled day, and were surprised to learn that it was an old one made over. Other people had old clothes that needed to be regenerated, and by observing the method of construction in the old garments, she learned how to make new ones. Thus she became a tailor, and served the public in that capacity for twenty years.

This all in addition to the multifarious duties incident to rearing a large family. The school board wanted her to be a teacher, but she reasoned that the teaching profession would take her away from the direct supervision of her family, while the tailoring business could be carried out in her own household where she could keep a grip on the domestic situation. The amount of work that went through her hands was prodigious. My more mature judgement of her confirms the estimate of my boyhood days, that she was the embodiment of all that was dignified, and noble and true in womankind. God bless her sacred memory.

Francis Webster was the son of a poor farmer, and had no chance for education. He and Betsy Parson met in their younger days, and became interested in each other. As I remember the family tradition, the wooing was mostly on his side, but she

agreed to wait for him until she was 21, and until he had made his fortune. He went to the gold diggings of Australia, but hearing of the discovery of gold in California, he returned there in 1849, and remained three years. In 1852 he went back to his native land, and his diary records that the bank of England gave him full value for \$1500 worth of gold dust. He went down to Wyndham only to discover that the young lady of his choice had moved with her people to London. He followed her to the Metropolis, and there learned to his dismay that the whole family had joined the Mormon Church.

In California he had heard hard stories about the Mormons, and he was much prejudiced against them. In this predicament it was a question of what should be done. He decided the matter himself, and went back to California for another three years. In 1855 he came back to London, bringing with him this time \$1200 in gold dust. Out of curiosity he went to the house where his former lover had resided to see if he could hear tidings of her and her people. He was surprised to find that they were still there. They had never expected to see him again, and he thought they had emigrated to America. Through them he became familiar with the doctrines of the church, and soon became a member himself. You who may have known him will remember his devotion to the cause of his religion to the day of his death. Having the religious difficulty out of the way, the young couple were not long in renewing the former pledges, and his diary records that they were married on the 5th day of December 1855.

The following spring the Siddistons and Websters started for America. Their wagons and teams had been ordered and paid for. At this time the handcart movement had been inaugurated by President Young, to give opportunity of emigration to the poorer class of European converts. It will be remembered that there were upward of forty thousand members of the Mormon Church in England alone. It was suggested that those who could do so, who had means to come with the wagons might come with the handcarts instead, and let the money go to help others. They decided to do this and Bro. Webster's diary records that he paid the passage for nine others besides himself and his wife. They little realized the terrible tragedy they were going into. They had beautiful clothein, and feather beds stowed in Japanned tin boxes.

But all these were left like junk by the wayside in the mad scramble to extricate themselves from their desperate situation. These things, together with the teams and wagons they had purchased, would have made them wealthy in those days, but they got through with barely the ragged clothing they stood up in. The Middletons seem to have come from Norfolk to London seven years before the emigration to America. Samuel Parsons, brother to grandmother Middleton found work for Grandfather Middleton as a railroad porter and the family took up their abode in Shoreditch, near Whitechapel.

My father is described as a boy as being short and stout until he was 15 or 16 years of age, and his mother was afraid he would not grow tall like her people. As you older people know he grew into a man of fine physique, a little above the average size. The trip to America seemed to start him growing. He has told me about getting lost in London when they first came, and being rescued by the police through remembering that there were large coke ovens near their home. He had small pox so bad that he was blind for 21 days, and the first thing he saw was a little donkey colt, which the neighbor boys brought upstairs to show him. He has told me many times with regret that his mother wanted him to go to school but he preferred to go to work, and found employment in a type foundry near where they lived.

With the expansive imagination of a child he saw the wonders of London, and took his departure before he became disillusioned. I thought from what I heard him say, that Shoreditch must be an extraordinary place, and even festering old Whitechapel was clothed with respectability by their deferential mention of the Whitechapel branch of the church. In the after years I visited these parts and worked for many months in the great London Hospital on the Mine end road, hard by. After making all due allowances for the possible retrograde movement in any section of a great city, I must say that Shoreditch was a sad parody of what I had expected to see, and Whitechapel seemed to be the home of every vagabond of east London. But quite likely the church membership was of a far superior order of people to the denizens of those squalid streets.

Of the London period of my people I have not much information. They seemed to have joined the church there, and spent their time in preparing for the migration.

to America. I have heard my father tell of the wild ringing of the bells when the news came the Sebastopol was taken. That must have been the year before they came.

They crossed the ocean on the sailing ship Horizon in the spring of 1856. The captain of the ship took a great liking to my father as a boy, and oftentook him for dinner. He tried to persuade the parents to let him remain on the ship as he was the type of boy they amde sea captains of.

The arrival to Iowa City must have been in the spring or very early summer. Through gross careless management on the part of those in charge of the emigration, the handcarts were not ready for them. At the end of six weeks as I recall my father's statement, there were only half the requisite number of carts ready, but they decided to wait no longer. The precious time would have averted their tragedy had things been ready so that they could have started their journey at once. A number of the party thought that they ought to remain and work in that part for the winter, but the counsel of the more enthusiastic ones prevailed and they started in August. In their ardent faith they believed that the storms would pass to the right and left of them, and that they would go as the children of Israel went through the Red Sea, dry shod. But they were soon to learn the inexorable law of the great plains, which is no respecter of persons. The snows of that autumn were early in their arrival, and unusual in their severity. The handcarts which were of poor construction began to break down and difficulties began to multiply. They forded freezing rivers, and made their camps on snow banks, where they had great difficulty to keep from freezing. Rations ran low, and they were reduced to 4 ounces of flour a day. My father told me that the sweetest morsel he ever ate was a piece of crow brought down by one of the gunners. One by one they saw their companions languish by the wayside and die. Nineteen of them went into a single grave. More than fifty percent of Martin's handcart company died of exhaustion and hunger and were buried in unmarked graves. But our family came out with one more than they started with. Amy Webster Leigh was born on the plains. When human fortitude could stand no more, they lay down on the banks of the Sweetwater to die. It was like their resurrection when the relief expedition sent by President Young reached their camp, and brought them food and clothing, and wagons to convey them. That first Christmas

They had nothing but dry bread for breakfast, but a brother Woodhouse invited them to his home for dinner, a kindness which they never forgot. They built a two room adobe house which still stands on the lot where Eliza Middleton lives.

My father found employment in the home of Mr. John Higbee, of whom and sister Higbee, he always spoke with the greatest respect. Later he carried the mail by pony express down to the Muddy settlements. His route lay right across the valley where St. George now stands, and there was no St. George at that time.

In 1862 he responded to a call to go and bring emigrants across the plains, and it was on this trip that he met my mother, who was a convert from Scotland. They were married as soon as they arrived in Salt Lake City, and took up their abode in a log house on the corner of the lot now occupied by Isaac Nelson. All the farming land on the Cedar Creek seemed to be occupied, so my father went down on the Shirts Creek and bought an interest, which he developed into a farm. For a time they lived in the fort, but when the trouble with the Indians abated, they moved into a log house nearby. About the earliest scintillation of memory comes to me now is an occasion in front of this old log house, when I fell head over heels into a large pail of water, after they got me all fixed with by best bib and tucker for a holiday trip to Cedar.

It is quite within the range of my recollection when we moved from the log house up to the new brick house, which still stands by the roadside in Hamilton's Fort. My father inherited the Middleton enthusiasm for work. Many was the evening that I worked by his side in the wheat field or the hayfield, until it got so dark we could work no more. The song of crickets, which reached its crescendo with the last departing light of day, is one of the vivid memories of my boyhood. I am most thankful of all the things for the fact that he taught us how to work.

He was successful as a farmer and cattleman. If his sphere of action had been where there was greater opportunity, I believe his executive ability might have counted for much. He did a great deal of charity without letting his left hand know what his right hand did. He died at a comparatively young age of 55 of ulcer of the stomach, a disease which in this day could be easily curtailed.

After the death of my grandmother Middleton, Grandfather Middleton married a

picturesque old welsh lady, who all you older folks remember as on of the unique characters in the older Cedar. Of this marriage there was only one child, William Middleton, Jr. The only brother my father had. Will was said to be spoiled by, but he grew up to be an honorable man. He was of special help to me when he served as my anaesthetist, and drove me on many a midnight errand at the time I resided in this part. When I reached Rome on the European tour I got the sad word that he had died of typhoid fever.

And now to the noble band of heroic men and women collectively, who came here to subdue this wilderness, we join in a full measure of merited praise. They are neighbors still in the silent aisles of yonder churchyard. They have gone to their just reward, and we of the next generation are growing old in their footsteps.

Let us hope that the spirit of united effort, of civic virtue, and of unselfish devotion to the cause of their fellows may be our heritage from them and that we, in turn, may hand it on to the generations yet unborn.