

COUNTRY DOCTORS OF NORTHERN GARLAND COUNTY, ARKANSAS

By
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(Four of the "Country Doctor" sketches were inadvertently omitted from the 1965 RECORD and the article is, therefore, continued in this issue.)

Dr. J. A. Middleton
(1874-1910)

James Adolphus Middleton was born near Black Springs in Montgomery County, Arkansas November 27, 1874. His father, John Thomas Middleton, was born June 28, 1841 in Hardin County, Tennessee and was the son of Thomas Jefferson Middleton, originally from Edgefield District, South Carolina, and wife, Matilda Moore Reyburn, originally from North Carolina.

John Thomas Middleton was one of five sons, all of whom served in the War Between the States. He wore Confederate Gray and was wounded at Shiloh, but was able to return to his company to serve throughout the War. In 1870, he married Miss Rebecca Crabb of Tennessee and in 1874, moved to Arkansas, living a short time in Clark County and then moved over into Montgomery County. While camped near Black Springs, his first child was born and he was later known to say, "Our son chose the site of our homestead by being born there, so I set about cutting timber and making a home." There were seven children, but only three lived to maturity; Dr. J. A. of Cedar Glades, Dr. Benjamin Crabb Middleton of Texarkana, and Nancy, who was the second Mrs. Hamp Williams of Hot Springs. In 1901, John's wife died and he married Miss Mollie Shannon, who bore him three children, a son and two daughters (Zena & Linda). He lived until 1920 and his obituary in the Montgomery County Review, Wombie (Norman), Arkansas dated October 29, 1920 was written by his daughter, Mrs. Hamp Williams, and vividly describes a man loved by his family, devoted to his church, and well liked by the community.

James A. Middleton was reared on the farm where he chose to be born and was educated in the rural school at Black Springs, later going to the Academy at Mount Ida. His license from the Medical School in Little Rock, "for the practice of medicine and surgery" was issued August 18, 1903, bears the number 57 and was recorded in Vol. A, page 47, at Mount Ida on January 30, 1904. The doctor practiced in Pike County for a while and under Dr. Wingfield at Mount Ida before moving to Cedar Glades, Arkansas.

Dr. Middleton first married Miss Lola Lamb of Muse, Arkansas, the daughter of Bud and Mary Lamb and she gave birth to one son, Waldo, on August 22, 1905, but she died soon after. The doctor married second Miss Orlean Roper, the daughter of Adison "Bud" and Mary Jane (Hawkins) Roper. Bud Roper was a well known and respected farmer of Cedar Glades but his greatest claim to fame was his supply of beautiful daughters. Jule Parson used to say, "If you wanted to get together a group for a social and square dance, just send a wagon for the Roper girls." At one time there were five of them at home of marriageable age. The Bud Roper family consisted of: (1) Jim who died of smallpox in the epidemic of 1894, age 21; (2 & 3 twins) Ada married first Jake Thornton and 2nd Will Ray, Ida married Bob Chew; (4) Butler married Nellie Brown; (5) Orlene born May 1, 1855 married first Dr. Middleton and second Joe Payton; (6) Eula married Bob Thornton; (7 & 8 twins) Irene married Charlie Bradley, Eugene died young; (9) Jessie married Ed Frantz; and (10) Julia married Murl Corley.

Dr. J. A. Middleton ministered to the sick of Cedar Glades and to a large surrounding area, often traveling miles to see the safe birth of a new resident. His widow recalls that on occasion, he even pulled teeth and once pulled twelve for a young lady as they sat on the front porch discussing the weather and just threw the teeth into a flower bed. He traveled by buggy and sometimes on horse back. Once he was returning from a sick call late at night and a panther or mountain lion, as they are called, jumped out of a tree and landed on his horse's rump. Well, naturally the horse reared up and took off. The cat fell off, but not so the doctor. He managed to hang on and made it home safe.

Another story is told on the doctor - that one he owned a spirited stallion and a friend of his, Jule Parson also had one. They got the notion to go to Hot Springs and use the two stallions to pull the buckboard. After a few horse fights, they managed to get them hitched up and off they went. It's told that they had quite a time in town trying to keep the two stallions from fighting, especially when they would meet a mare.

Doctors in those days didn't specialize as in present times, but some soon gained recognition as being especially good with certain ailments. This was so with Dr. Middleton as to his cure for the slow fever (now known as typhoid). Also his method for preventing a small child from scratching when it had smallpox was very effective. He would have the child sewn up in a greasy sack. One patient recalls having experienced this treatment and it was very effective. He didn't have any scars except on his back where he laid and he was 26 years old before he got a smallpox vaccination.

The doctor loved baseball and would play when the men and boys got together at the Old Reunion Grounds, a picnic area between Cedar Glades and Buckville, so named because it was used for reunions of Civil War Veterans. He also would go across the river to Bear and participate in games. Some believe his death was caused by a heart attack while playing baseball.

He died August 27, 1910, leaving a widow and three small children. Though a young man, he had earned the esteem of his neighbors by being a good doctor, a successful farmer, a worker in the church and active in community affairs. He was a member of the Masonic Lodge at Cedar Glades, a Charter Member of the Odd Fellow Lodge #293 at Buckville and active in the Woodmen of the World. He was buried in the cemetery at Cedar Glades and when Blakely Dam was built, his grave #267, was moved to the New Mt. Pleasant Cemetery next to the Mt. Valley Cemetery and numbered B-137. His marker bears a Woodmen of the World emblem and reads, "Ever near us though unseen, thy dear immortal spirit treads, for all the boundless universe, in life there are no dead."

The doctor was survived by his widow, Orlean, and three children: Waldo, born Aug. 22, 1905; Howard, born December 7, 1908, and Adolphine born May 7, 1910. Waldo married Miss Carmón Cook and had one son, James, who is the father of one son and two daughters and lives in Little Rock, Arkansas. Waldo, who furnished several stories for this sketch, died May 26, 1965 and was laid to rest on a peaceful Idaho hillside overlooking a lovely valley, much like the land where he was born. Howard married Miss Sadie Jackson and lives at 912 Garland Avenue, Hot Springs. They have no children. Adolphine "Dollie" married Joe Kindred and has two daughters, Jolean and Nancy. Jolean is Mrs. John Aubery and has an adopted daughter Falean. Nancy Ann married Loyd Coker and is the mother of two sons, Richard Kurt and Clinton Lane Coker. Orlean (Roper) Middleton remarried December 15, 1918 to Joe Payton and they are the parents of Joe; Rosemary, (Mrs. B. D. Sparks) and James Payton.