

Middleton Story: Origin, End of an Outlaw

Abuse by Soldier Starts Texan on Way to Notoriety

By **ROMAINE SAUNDERS**
Editor-in-Chief
Diamond Jubilee Edition

Westward the course of empire has taken its way. And the forerunners of empires have been the gold seekers, the adventures and the legitimate home builders.

The settlers in and about O'Neill made a trail up the Elkhorn and others made wagon tracks through the grass toward the Black Hills, the lure there being gold deposits. The Black Hills region was closed territory in the 1870s under military guard. Some of these soldiers exceeded their authority. One such was a lieutenant in command of a detachment of U. S. cavalry, who met the John Gordon party in what is now Sheridan county, Nebraska. Party was headed for the gold strike in wagons drawn by oxen. The cavalry lieutenant ordered the oxen turned loose and the wagons and equipment burned. The soldiers obeyed orders, but the lieutenant was fired from the army in disgrace. The town of Gordon, a few miles from where this incident occurred, is said to have been named for the outraged Mr. Gordon.

Whether the government ever paid him for his loss has not been gone into for the purpose of this story.

Middleton Gets Into Trouble With Soldier

Since Benedict Arnold sold out to the British and Teddy Roosevelt as president disbanded a regiment of negro soldiers for unsoldierly conduct, there have been but few to bring disgrace to the uniform of a soldier or sailor. One soldier tried it on Doc Middleton and it cost the soldier his life, made a fugitive and an outlaw of Middleton, or Riley as was his real name.

The redoubtable Doc had come into Nebraska on a Texas cow trail as horse wrangler. At a dance at Sidney he had some words with a soldier who struck Middleton down and as he lay on the floor closed in to administer further blows, when Middleton shot and killed the soldier.

Middleton got up, hastened to the cow camp, mounted a horse and disappeared. He rode all that night, holed up through the day and worked northeast at night until he reached the Niobrara valley. North Nebraska towns had inherited a boy from Texas turned outlaw.

It is not known that Middleton ever stole even a lead nickel. His one specialty was good horses—until he looked into the depth of the soft hazel eyes of a young miss up on the Keya Paha. He was living by clandestine visits to where there was a likely span of horses and he knew no other means of courtship. The romance of a young woman nurtured in right ways with an outlaw could not endure. A slight built gent visited Holt county a few years ago. He claimed to be the son of the Middletons.

At a card table in the rear room of a pool hall three men sat as the Summer night closed in and the hectic evening got going in the little frontier town in Holt county. The back door to the pool hall stood open. Outside something stirred. An ivory handled six-shooter flashed in the hand of one of the men at the card table and a bullet was sent through the open door. Two men were left at the table; Middleton made his get away.

Life of the Outlaw Ends on Jail Couch

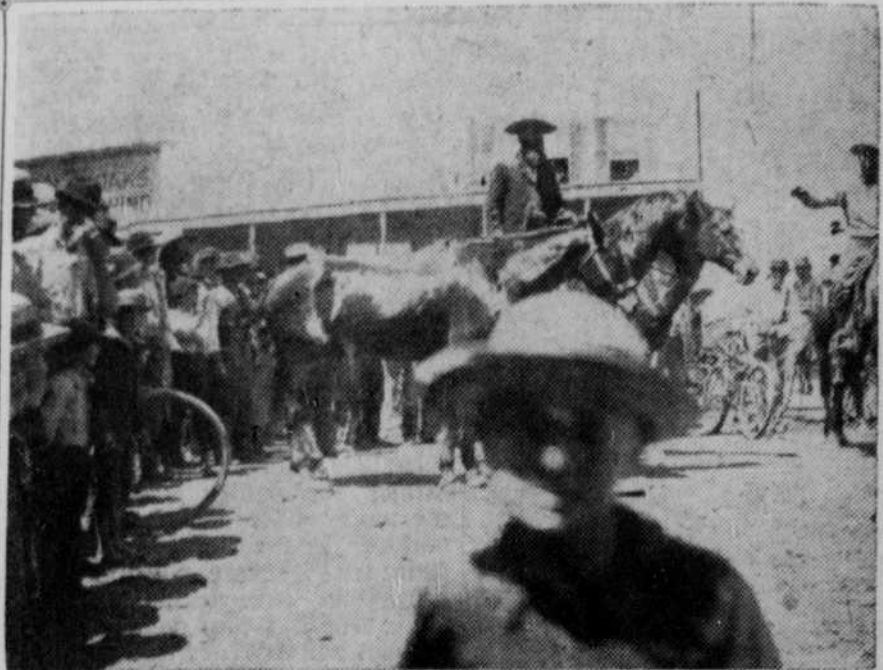
After a term in the Nebraska penitentiary for horse stealing, Middleton returned to his old haunts at O'Neill, Atkinson, Stuart, but like the passing of the spectacular builder of Angeles Temple the glamour was gone. He undertook the ride in the cowboy race from Chadron to Chicago at the time of the World's Fair but did not complete the ride.

Shifting Westward from one town to another, he became a confirmed alcoholic and died in a jail.

A man of ability, generous and open-handed, a character that might have contributed something worth while to the development of North-Nebraska was set afloat on a career of crime by the act of a truculent young bully in the uniform of a United States soldier, and died miserably on a cot in a town jail.

Apparently Middleton did not die in Rushville, where he holed up after leaving his Holt county haunts. The following letter is in answer to an inquiry addressed to the editor of the Sheridan County Star, at Rushville:

"Rushville, Nebraska. — Dear Mr. Saunders: According to the best information we have, Doc Middleton died in a jail in Douglas, Wyo. But there is one man who can tell you the whole story as he was at Doc's bedside when he died and even made the funeral arrangements. He is Ed Sevier, of Gordon.



On 1,000-mile Chadron-to-Chicago horse race, illustrious Doc Middleton (center) and Joe Gillespie (at right edge of photo) ride into O'Neill. (For details of 1,000-mile race, see page 6, section F).

"Doc was in and around Rushville from 1885 to 1895. He ran a roulette wheel here in Rushville in a saloon owned by Sam Bass and participated in several high stake poker games here and in Gordon and Hay Springs. In 1891 he operated a saloon in Gordon for a short time. He stole a large bunch of horses from the Pine Ridge reservation at the time of the Indian War in the '90s. From here he drifted on to Chadron and then to Crawford and then to Harrison and finally to Wyoming where he died."

"While in Chadron he entered the famous horse race from Chadron to Chicago but his horse gave out near Sioux City.

We believe that he homesteaded a place North of Rushville some time in the late '80s. It was common talk around here in those days that he engineered several stage robberies of stages carrying gold from the Black Hills to Sidney. He was a good pistol shot and an excellent rider according to those who knew him here. He did become an alcoholic and was a hard drinker and gambler while in this country.

"Please send us a copy of the anniversary issue and hope this dope is of some assistance to you.

"Sevier can tell you lots more but we did not have time to contact him."
"PHIL GOTTSCHALK."

PIONEERS FIND BOOKS ARE SCARCE

When Available They Are
Read, Discussed in
Family Circle

By **CLARA B. JOHNSON**
Executive Secretary State
Library Commission

Seventy-five years of growing has brought many interesting periods of change in the community library as well as in other phases of life of the people in this prairie state.

The first books to be brought into the new country by the settlers were the books of their religion, books to teach their children to read and spell and cipher, an old classic or two and perhaps a book of poetry or a historical biography. It was a privilege to be able to borrow a book and reading aloud in a family circle was a common way to share one.

In a decade or two when the social life of the new community became organized and persons of like interests formed clubs, circulating libraries within the group were often established. Out of this grew subscription libraries which became the basis for development of the public library.

A stimulus to establishment of tax supported libraries came through the benefaction of Andrew Carnegie who is responsible for the erection of some 70 library buildings in Nebraska during the years 1901 to 1922. In O'Neill the township made the agreement and provided the necessary public funds for site and maintenance.

Today the public library attempts to meet the varied reading needs of the people in the community within the limits of its revenue serving both children and adults with reading material for information and recreation.

Trends for the future indicate a widening of the sphere of influence of the library, providing an opportunity to read to all the people, city and rural alike, through development of library service on a county or regional plan with more adequate support for more satisfying library service.

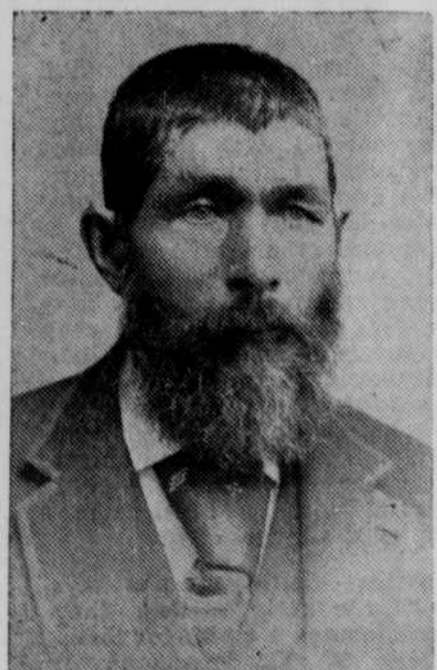
DEPOT AGENT WET?
The Holt County Banner had this editorial note in its issue of Oct. 22, 1883: "The depot agent at this place has been neglecting business and devoting his time and energies to the pursuit of such pleasure as is to be found in strong drink, until the community is pretty thoroughly disgusted with him."

FIRE DEVASTATES
The South side of town has witnessed the destruction by fire of three flour mills, a packing house, a creamery building, a depot, three livery barns and a lumber yard beside the town's largest hotel. On the North side the most disastrous fire was the burning of the convent.

MAIL MILESTONE
On July 1, 1902, the mail carriers on star routes began a new service. Under orders from the Postal Department they delivered mail for the first time to citizens on the route traveled from one postoffice to another. This service still continues.



DR. NORVELL, WIFE . . .
Dr. T. V. Norvell and wife (above) helped develop the Chambers community along with R. C. Wry and J. L. Coppoc. (See story on page 8, section D).



ARRIVES IN 1879 . . . Daniel D. Cronin (above) arrived in O'Neill from Northern Michigan in 1879, farmed near here.

SENATOR ALLEN TALKS MONEY

There had been nothing more exciting than a prairie fire to interest O'Neill people for some days until a late Spring morning in 1888 when word went around that Mrs. Ab Wilcox had been shot and killed. The Wilcox home was a long, low unpainted abode on East Douglas street about where Ralph Leidy now presides over an important line of trade. At the same time there was the story of an elopement involving the same family. Miss Cora Wilcox had gone away with a cowboy. The shooting of her mother was reported to be accidental. Ab Wilcox was arrested, tried in district court and acquitted. M. F. Harrington had been employed to assist the county attorney in the prosecution. Wilcox engaged as his lawyer William V. Allen, of Madison, while two grown sons of Mrs. Wilcox got Mr. Harrington into the case.

But this story is to follow the spectacular career of Mr. Allen. The rising tide of populists in the early '90s became the vehicle on which Allen rode into a seat in the United States senate. Allen was senator from March 4, 1893, to March 4, 1899, by which

time populism and the free silver movement had petered out. Senator Allen's maiden speech began August 23, 1893, and lasted about 10 days.

When Allen arose on the floor and began his long-winded exhibition of prairie wisdom and political wisdom with the customary, Mr. President, the wise guys from New England and old guard from Southern states smiled, gave each other the wink, called up the words of some wise guys in old Athens when St. Paul

stood on Mars Hill, and remarked, "What will this babler say?" They were soon to find out.

It was a special session of the congress convened at the call of President Grover Cleveland with the view of relieving the country of a financial panic. Fiat money, intrinsic value, free silver at 16 to 1—these were the "paramount issues" of the day. Allen and his Western colleagues flaunted the banner of free silver while Eastern and Southern senators stuck to the

gold standard. Allen's speech made history in the senate as an endurance race, turned sneers in that august chamber first to respect then admiration. At the outset Mr. Allen closed the mouths of his hecklers by casting this into their teeth, "The senator from Nebraska will pursue his own course." His speech disclosed a knowledge of the monetary setup of the country that amazed the gold standard boys, known as gold bugs, won for Allen the respect of the old guard and accomplished little

else. The special session accomplished nothing and tough times continued until the Cleveland administration was replaced by McKinley and re-enactment of tariff laws. Fiat money, intrinsic value, free silver and populism perished together, at least one populist editor in Nebraska repudiating Mr. Allen by referring to him as "Windy V. Allen."

"Voice of The Frontier" . . . Mondays, Wednesdays, Saturdays.

This Is An APPEAL for HELP

-- from --

St. Anthony's Hospital Building Fund

"A Modern Hospital to Serve the Great Sand Hills Area"

ST. ANTHONY'S HOSPITAL, recently given this new official title, was conceived about three years ago to alleviate an acute need for first-class rural general hospital facilities in the area. Up until now, 73 thousand dollars has been raised through subscription and solicitation. The minimum goal by this method is 100 thousand dollars. The U. S. Government, through the U. S. Public Health Bureau and the Nebraska Department of Health, is keenly aware of the need for first-class hospital facilities in this area and will make available 100 thousand dollars in the form of a grant for building purposes.

THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS, a Roman Catholic order successfully operating a number of large hospitals throughout the country, have provided a building site in O'Neill, have agreed to operate and staff this hospital when completed, and, in addition, have agreed to assume up to 100 thousand dollars indebtedness, if necessary, in order that this hospital plan will become a reality.

THUS AS OF THIS WEEK, only 27 thousand dollars is needed before work can begin on this medical center. The U. S. Public Health Bureau and the Nebraska Department of Health estimate that, when completed, St. Anthony's 40-bed capacity will meet the hospital requirements for more than 30 thousand people in the Sand Hills area.

TIME HAS COME that the hospital movement needs your help. And your help is needed badly. After three years of preliminary planning and limited solicitation, the third—and final—drive has been launched. St. Anthony's Hospital will be built, there will be no turn back, the goal is in sight.

MOST READERS of this advertisement—and their families—reside from 50 to 150 miles away from existing first-class hospital facilities. There is every reason why you should be anxious for and willing to contribute substantially to an institution that will provide the best in medical facilities. We, members of the St. Anthony's Hospital Building Committee, appeal to you to give the Hospital every consideration. We earnestly wish you'd ask yourself: "What will St. Anthony's Hospital mean to me and members of my family in time of need?" Having thoughtfully answered that question, we're confident you will turn to the coupon below, fill it in, write out a check and mail them.

—St. Anthony's Hospital Building Committee.

ST. ANTHONY'S HOSPITAL Building Fund

OFFICE HQ.
O'NEILL, NEBR.

(This advertisement has been paid for by friends of St. Anthony's Hospital who have provided an expense account to be used in connection with fund-raising.)

COUPON

ST. ANTHONY'S HOSPITAL BUILDING FUND
"A Modern Hospital to Serve the Great Sand Hills Area"
Office Headquarters
O'Neill, Neb.

Enclosed is (my check) (money order) (cash) in the amount of \$ _____ This is my contribution to St. Anthony's Hospital Building Fund.

Name _____

Route or Box No. _____

Postoffice _____ State _____