

CHAPTER XVI

MIDDLETON-DOWNING REUNIONS 1908-1932

*'Tis good sometimes to travel back
To days of kindred kind,
Retrace the pioneer father's tracks
Along the hallowed line;
Visit the old ancestral homes,
Our parents' virtue learn,
And round their monumental stones
Let veneration burn.*

The annual reunion has kept alive the kindred spirit of the early family love that predominated in the Middleton-Downing household. Not always the same people come every year although many are faithful annual supporters without whose loyal efforts the organization would not exist. There are a number of Middleton descendants living in and near Elkhart, Ind., in the very atmosphere of the old homestead. They descend from the brothers and sisters who did not wander, who simply settled on their inheritance or nearby. They are the ones who have witnessed the coming and going during their lifetime of the distant relatives. They have inherited the old time Middleton-Downing hospitality which is showered on visiting relatives. By the very fact that this annual visitation takes place the family history has not been buried in complete oblivion, for the organization breathes most religiously in memories and in permanent gratitude to the earlier generations. Distant relatives should annually report any birth, death, marriage, or change of address to the reunion secretary or president.

Each year all deaths are reported and memorial services are held for the departed. This is followed by a business meeting at which time the officers for the following year are elected.

The first official reunion was held Thursday, Sept. 24, 1908, at Island Park, Elkhart, Ind., with fifty-nine persons present. Oral Middleton of Elwood, Neb., acted as president. After a sumptuous picnic dinner a short business session was held. Several selections were sung. The following officers were elected for the ensuing year: Oral Middleton, President; Richard Lake, Vice-President; Mrs. O. G. Kibbe, Secretary; Mrs. Francis Light, Treasurer. Fred Middleton,

Buryl Hartman, and Will Middleton were appointed to act as an entertainment committee for the next reunion. A picture of the group was taken.

The second annual reunion was held at Island Park, Elkhart, Ind., on Friday, Aug. 20, 1909. After dinner the business meeting was called to order by the vice-president owing to the death of the president, Oral Middleton of Elwood, Neb. One hundred persons were present.

The tenth annual reunion was held at Island Park Saturday, Aug. 11, 1917, with eighty persons registered. Charles Spahr presided. At the time of this reunion Company E of the Indiana National Guard, later a part of the Rainbow Division in France, was encamped in the park and their drills and sports gave a great deal of pleasure to the members of the reunion.

The eleventh reunion was held at Island Park on Saturday, Aug. 10, 1918, with one hundred present. Dedication of the Service Flag with the following relatives enrolled took place at this time:

Clarence Middleton, Y. M. C. A. in France.

Oliver D. Scott, Co. G, 350th Inf.

Albert N. Rouse, Co. G, 350th Inf.

Hoyt C. Reeves, 120th Co., Marine Corps in France.

Corwin F. Foster, 139th Inf. in France.

Roy W. Reeves, 120th Marine Corps in France.

William C. Zieber, 1st Field Artillery.

Earl S. Harvey, Co. L, 168th Inf.

Amos Schulke, Sgt. in regular Army.

John H. Hass, 45th Inf.

Richard Waller, of Elkhart.

Howard Jones, of Boyne City, Mich.

John Stotts, of Goshen.

Francis R. Light talked in connection with the ceremony. A collection of sixteen dollars was taken for the Red Cross. The Middleton gathering was given credit many times for stimulating other groups to do the same.

The twelfth reunion was held at Island Park Saturday, Aug. 9, 1919, with one hundred present. It was voted at this meeting to dismantle the Service Flag and return all stars to their owners. John Hass of North Liberty gave an interesting talk on army life. Francis R. Light mentioned the fact that none of the blue stars were turned to gold and expressed the hope that no descendant would ever be called upon to perform such a duty again. It was voted to hold the reunion the second Saturday in August regardless of the date and that dinner would be served at twelve o'clock prompt, an hour earlier than usual.

The sixteenth reunion was held Sunday, Aug. 12, 1923, with 123 in attendance.

The twenty-first annual reunion was held Sunday, Aug. 4, 1929, with a celebration appropriate to the one-hundredth anniversary of the coming of the Middletons to Indiana. After the picnic dinner at Island Park the company proceeded to the little cemetery, almost a century old, just east of Middleton Run

on the old Vistula Road. At that place just a short distance from the road had been placed a five-ton boulder of light gray granite, bearing a large bronze tablet in memory of John Middleton and Elizabeth Downing-Middleton, founders of the family in Elkhart County. After a short program, letters were read from absent members of the family, an address was given by Fred Middleton of Hammond, and a few appropriate words were spoken by the president of the Elkhart County Historical Society. Following this the tablet was unveiled by Iva Middleton of Mishawaka, Ind., a great granddaughter, and Lois Middleton of Hammond, Ind., a great, great granddaughter of the progenitor, John Middleton. After a song by the audience and a prayer by Mrs. John Rine of Union, Mich., the president of the Historical Society formally dedicated the marker to the memory of John Middleton, pioneer father and Elizabeth Downing-Middleton, pioneer mother, with their twelve children.

At the twenty-fourth reunion it was decided to hold the twenty-fifth one at the Middleton Cemetery east of Elkhart. This reunion was held Sunday, Aug. 7, 1932, with 71 members present. The entire plot of ground contains an acre and a half of land beginning at the Bristol road, which is State Route 19 out of Elkhart, and going back to the bank of the St. Joe River. The graves are on the river bank surrounded by many large trees and cannot be seen from the road as the markers are all small. There is a wire fence around the entire plot of ground with a large swinging gate at the entrance which is kept chained against intruders. The marker sets just inside the fence to the left of the entrance and is plainly visible from the road. The grounds around the marker contain few trees and are thickly carpeted with myrtle making an excellent grove for the family gatherings. The entire lot is kept in perfect condition by a caretaker hired by the reunion and presents a fine appearance to those viewing it.

At the 1932 reunion an official flower, known as Love-in-the-Mist, was adopted for the family. The original seeds were the only ones brought to Indiana by Elizabeth Downing-Middleton in 1830, and have been seeding themselves on the old Middleton homestead. Mr. and Mrs. Francis Light presented these seeds to the reunion as Mrs. Eudora Mitchel-Light is the only one who owns any of the original Middleton land. She is also the youngest granddaughter of the ancestral Middletons. This seed is to be kept among members of the Middleton clan as much as possible. It produces a compact free-flowering plant with finely cut foliage and the flowers are blue and white mixed. It was also decided at this gathering to present a pin designed to represent a coat of arms at the twenty-sixth annual reunion to each member attending twenty-five or more reunions. The honor roll of members who have attended every reunion since Sept. 24, 1908, include Mr. and Mrs. Richard Lake, Miss Iva Middleton, Jake (Jacob) Middleton, John Middleton, Rhoda Mitchel-Eby, Mr. and Mrs. Francis Light, Mrs. Russell Sanderson, and Mrs. Ammon F. Runkle.

A reunion was held Saturday, Feb. 3, 1877, long before the official reunions



This monument shall be our sacred shrine,
Which, descendants, not yet created, shall revere,
And tongues in the future shall rehearse
Tradition and sacred bonds most dear.

were organized. The following account is an excerpt from the "Elkhart Review" of Feb. 8, 1877:

"The reunion of the family of John Middleton was held at the residence of Michael Mitchel, in Concord Township, Elkhart Co., on the third of February, 1877. John Middleton was born Feb. 12, 1777, in Sussex Co., Del. He married Elizabeth Downing in 1802 and moved to Franklin Co., Ohio. In Feb., 1841, his wife died and his youngest daughter, Elizabeth, kept house for him until July 17, 1847, when he died at the age of 70 years, 5 months and 5 days. He had raised a family of twelve children all of whom followed their mother to her grave and eleven of whom paid their last respects to their father at his grave. There were seven boys, three of whom still live; John D. Middleton in Adair Co., Iowa, aged 65; Joseph B. in Mercer Co., Mo., aged 56; and Wesley in Elkhart Co., Ind., aged 64. There were five girls all of whom still live. Mary aged 71, is the wife of Ozias Stotts of this county; Sarah aged 61, is the widow of Manasseh Minear, residing in Putnam Co., Mo.; Eliza aged 59, is the widow of James Settle and resides in Marion Co., Iowa; Nancy Jane aged 53, is the wife of Richard C. Lake of Elkhart Co.; Elizabeth is the wife of Michael, and is 51 years of age.

"The names of the children present with the weight of each is as follows: Mary Stotts 127 pounds; Sarah Minear 152½ pounds; Eliza Settle 135 pounds; Nancy J. Lake 153 pounds; Elizabeth Mitchel 144 pounds; Wesley Middleton 160 pounds. Sons-in-law present were Richard C. Lake and Michael Mitchel. Daughters-in-law present were Rebecca Middleton and Elizabeth Middleton."

**REMEMBER THE RELATION THAT BINDETH YOU TO UNITY,
AND PREFER NOT A STRANGER TO THINE OWN KIN.**

—ROBERT DODSLEY.