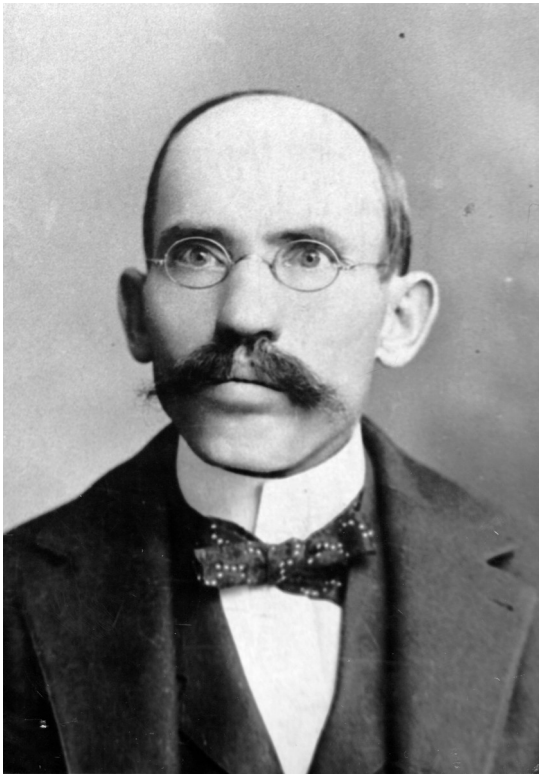


## George W. Middleton, Early Southern Utah Doctor

by Jay M. Jones



Dr. George W. Middleton. Photo courtesy SUU Special Collections.

One of Southern Utah's outstanding doctors was George W. Middleton, a native of Hamilton Fort, Utah. After receiving his doctorate in 1892 at Louisville, he began medical practice in Cedar City.

In addition to his medical practice, Dr. Middleton had a keen interest in civic affairs. In 1903, liquor prohibition became the major issue in Cedar City politics. As the nominee for mayor on the Citizens Prohibition Party ticket, Dr. George Middleton won 69% of the vote.

Early the next year, Cedar City prohibited the manufacture or sale of alcoholic beverages within the city limits, becoming one of the first localities in the nation to do so.

Dr. Middleton enjoyed the outdoors, and held a lifelong interest in geology. He was also a key promoter of the first culinary water system in Cedar City, which resulted in a significant reduction of local cases of typhoid fever.

In 1904, Dr. George W. Middleton's growing medical and surgical reputation brought an increasing number of people to Cedar City in need of treatment. Up to that time, Dr. Middleton's out-of-town patients were quartered among the townspeople as well as could be arranged.

In order to provide more comfortable care for the patients and allow care providers better efficiencies, Dr. Middleton rented a house on 300 West and equipped it as a hospital. Electrical power was not yet available in Cedar City, so to provide better lighting for an upstairs operating room, skylights were installed in the roof.

The first operation in the new hospital was in June of 1904 for appendicitis, and Miss Emily Banks of Minersville was the patient.

Another case of appendicitis was a sad experience in the early practice of Dr. Middleton, as related by William R. Palmer in the 1942 edition of the Utah Historical Quarterly. He had been called to the local Indian camp too see a sick boy. After diagnosing the problem, Dr. Middleton wanted to take the boy into town for an operation.

The Medicine Man resisted, so Dr. Middleton took out his prescription notepad and sketched the boy's intestines, showing the diseased point. He indicated where an incision needed to be made to remove the appendix. Still, permission was not given for Dr. Middleton to treat the boy.



Dr. Middleton stands outside the house that became Cedar City's first hospital. On the porch are nurses Belle MacDonald, Belle Perry, and Kate Palmer. Photo courtesy SUU Special Collections.

A few days later, Dr. Middleton met the Medicine Man and inquired about the boy. He was horrified to learn that the Medicine Man had been impressed with the doctor's sketches, and had decided that he could perform the operation himself with a butcher knife. Tragically, the boy did not recover.

Lack of understanding of basic sanitation was widespread. Dr. Middleton took a local sheep rancher to court to keep sheep from grazing at the source of the city water supply. The Justice of the Peace did not see a problem. Dr. Middleton tried to explain about germs and how they carry

disease. The Justice was not impressed – he reportedly said, “Show me a germ and I’ll eat it. Case dismissed.”

Dr. Middleton’s reputation as a surgeon continued to grow around Southern Utah. On a return trip from Kanab in 1906, news that he was passing through that area went ahead of him, and several people sought him out along the way. Arriving at Panguitch, he performed five surgeries, leaving the patients in the care of the local physician, Dr. Clark.

Nurses that assisted Dr. Middleton in caring for local patients included Belle MacDonald, Belle Perry, Kate Palmer, and Priscilla Urie.

In 1906, a farewell party was held in Cedar City for Dr. Middleton, who was on his way to major medical facilities in the eastern U. S. and London for additional medical training. Following that, Dr. Middleton established practice in Salt Lake City and became one of the leading surgeons in the Intermountain West.

In addition to his medical practice, Dr. Middleton continued his interest in geology. He became friends with University of Utah geology professor Frederick J. Pack, and together they arranged for horseback expeditions to Cedar Breaks and Zion Canyon with other leaders and residents of Salt Lake City and Cedar City.

George W. Middleton died December 8, 1938 in Salt Lake City from a heart ailment. In an obituary, the Salt Lake Telegram stated, “Dr. George W. Middleton had lived an abundant and intense life. A one line biography of this widely beloved man would possess a sense of completeness if it but said, ‘He went about doing good.’ “

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