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## MAZE 2014 November Edition

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Submitted by: William ("Bill") Sterling

### Whatever happened to Charles O. Middlebrook, #465 MFR?

This is a story about one man in the CT Middlebrook family. But first, a little history. Michael Middlebrook (#16 MFR), great grandson of Joseph (b. 1610) came to Wilton Parish from Fairfield CT in 1755. He settled in what was later to be called the Middlebrook district of the town, so-called because so many of Michael's progeny built homes there. Michael bought his home from the Betts family, and said home was inhabited by the Middlebrook family for 200+ years. N.B.: When the Middlebrook family held their reunion in CT in 2011, town historian Bob Russell gave us a tour of this area.

Michael's gg grandson Charles O. Middlebrook (#465) was born in this Middlebrook district in 1852 to the prominent Samuel Middlebrook (#229) and his wife Artemesia Olmsted. Based on the attached article and the 1908 obituary of his father Samuel, we believe Charles O. Middlebrook, too, was born in this house. However, it appears that the Middlebrook prominence faded with Charles O.

Many years ago, my mother (born Charlotte Elizabeth Middlebrook) told my two sisters and me that nothing is known of her paternal grandfather, the Subject of this writing. Her father, Chellis Middlebrook, told her that his father "took off and went south". He also told her that you should never look too far back in your family because you might find some skeletons hiding there. We never really knew if he had some particular secret in mind when he said that.

Granddad (Chellis) died in 1953 and took whatever information he might have had to his grave, thus closing that chapter 61 years ago. A few times since then my mother repeated the same words about our great grandfather "going south".

Then, about five years ago I saw a very short abridged article in a recent Wilton, CT magazine that mentioned a Charles Middlebrook eloping with his sister-in-law in the year 1880. WOW, what a discovery! I was able to contact the writer who informed me that he got the information from The Ridgefield Press, a weekly newspaper that has been published continuously since 1875 in Ridgefield, CT. Initially, this paper carried all the news from Ridgefield and the surrounding towns, of which Wilton is one.

In April of 2010, I went to CT for a few days to visit my kids. On one of those days my son, Tad and I went to the Ridgefield Library to check the Ridgefield Press microfilms on file there. Since I was also meeting with a cousin, Richard Middlebrook, that day I gave the task to Tad to see what he could find. Well, it didn't take long before he came running with the news that HE FOUND SOMETHING! It was an article in the June 16, 1880 issue of the newspaper. It seems my great grandfather left his wife and ran off with her sister a couple of weeks before that date.

I present the article here from the Ridgefield Press for your enjoyment. However, there are a couple of errors in the article:

First paragraph, last sentence should read, "The children are cousins, for the woman was the *sister-in-law* of the man with whom she eloped," not *sister*. (Continued on page 3)

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## A REMARKABLE ELOPEMENT.

Running away from home with her brother-in-law.

Unusual excitement Caused in a Connecticut Town by Charles Middlebrook and Mrs. Lockwood, the Mother or Four Children--  
The Deserted Husband's Explanation.

The quiet and peaceful town of Wilton, Fairfield County, Ct., has been stirred to unwonted excitement in the past few days by an elopement that has taken from one family the mother of four children, and from another family the father of three children. The children are cousins, for the woman was sister of the man with whom she eloped.

On the top of Nod Hill Ambrose Lockwood, a well-to-do farmer, lives in a very comfortable house. He has a fine grove of trees in the court-yard, a good-sized barn, and fields that after hard toil, such as a Connecticut farmer only knows, yield a grateful return each year, except when the potato bugs eat everything. Mr. Lockwood is a weather-beaten, hard-fisted, easy-going sort of a man, and has been married fifteen years to Antoinette Beers, of Weston. She is a plump blonde of 37 years, and the fruit of their union has been a family of four children, aged respectively 13, 11, 10 and 9 years. About seven years ago a sister of Mrs. Lockwood, Agnes Beers, married Charles Middlebrook, then scarcely of age, son of Samuel Roe Middlebrook, of Wilton. Chas. Middlebrook has been somewhat of a rover, and has not accumulated property. He had the Yankee faculty of turning his hand to various occupations, but not the thrift to save and accumulate. His wife Agnes is a tall, rather comely woman of 35 years, fair and healthy. The fruit of their union has been three children, the youngest an infant. The two families have been much together, not only on account of the relationship of the sisters, but also because for a time the men were partners. For several years Lockwood & Middlebrook were in the lumber business. It was understood that Lockwood furnished the capital. But the business did not prosper, at least for Lockwood, and it was generally remarked that the brains of the business was in a fair way to eat up the capital. Within a year the partnership was dissolved. Lockwood devoted himself to his farm, and Middlebrook went to peddling cigars and other commodities, but was not

able, apparently, to provide fully for his family, who took up their quarters last April in the house of his father, about three miles from Nod Hill. Lately the visits of Charles Middlebrook to Nod Hill had been of marked frequency. It was noticed that he was about there a good deal at night, and Ambrose Lockwood heard of it. He could not see it, because his eyesight is not very good after dark, but he had his suspicions, and he set his children to watch and report to him if they saw Middlebrook about the premises.

"Although she said nothing to me about it," Lockwood said yesterday noon, when he came in from his hard work. "I have suspected her for some time. Middlebrook kept running here often, and she made excuses to go to South Norwalk. I had several talks with her about it, and told her she should not encourage him coming here. She said she would talk with him when she liked, and I couldn't stop her. I noticed lately that she was buying everything for herself and nothing for the children, and I told her she ought to take some of the money to fix up the children, but she paid no attention, and we had some words about it. Last Wednesday week, when I came in from the fields, I noticed she had her hair slicked up, and I suspected she had made up her mind to go, but she ran and sat down at the sewing machine when she saw me, and pretended to be sewing. I told my little girl to watch her, but she got out and went over the hill. When I found out she had gone I concluded to follow her, and went over to the railroad station, and there she was."

"What are you doing here?" I said.

"What are you following me for?" she replied.

"You will find out, I guess," I said, you had better come home.

"I'm not going with you," she said.

"If you go to South Norwalk now, you won't come back to my house any more," I told her. Then we talked the matter over, and finally I said I was going home, and if she wanted to come along she could. I started off, and she followed after. We had several miles to walk. When we got home I had the horse hitched up, and told her if she wished to go to South Norwalk we would go. But she said she would not ride with me any more. Well, it began to get dark, and I could not see much, but I told the children to keep a lookout for Middlebrook, for I suspected he would come sneaking about. Along about 11 o'clock I told her she had better lock up the house and go

to bed, but she ran out in the dark, and the children said Middlebrook came out from under the trees and went with her. I have not seen her since. I do not care to have harm come to her, but I would like to see him punished. I did not have any words with him because some time ago I signed his paper for \$400 and I have been hoping he would pay it. But for him to rob me of my money and my wife too, it's too bad."

It appears that Mr. Lockwood's suspicions of Wednesday were well founded, for at the time that Mrs. Lockwood went to the station to take the train for South Norwalk, Chas. Middlebrook bought a ticket, or rather got trusted for one from the good-natured station agent, Mr. Comstock, to go to South Norwalk in the same train. He had evidently arranged to meet her, because he went through the

train, and finding she was not there, he returned immediately. Mr. and Mrs. Lockwood and Mr. and Mrs. Middlebrook attended the Congregational Church a week ago last Sunday eve., although they are not members of the church. Mrs. Lockwood was very anxious to go, and it is believed that the arrangements for the elopement were made on that occasion.

Mrs. Chas. Middlebrook is much oppressed by the double treachery of her sister and her husband. As she sat mournfully rocking a cradle and stitching on a custom shirt yesterday in the home of her father-in-law, she said: "I never suspected any such thing of the kind. My husband has always provided for his family, at least in part, and they must be very hard hearted indeed, both of them, to do such a thing. My sister was older than myself."

The runaway couple were seen at Brewer's Station, on the Harlem Road, on the Friday following their disappearance, by Mr. Samuel Meade, of Wilton, who knew nothing at the time of the elopement. He saw them at a hotel indulging in the luxury of ice cream. They seemed to be trying to avoid him. He is the only one that has seen them since they quit Wilton.

The mystery in Wilton is how the runaways propose to make a living. Middlebrook has always needed help from his father, or others, and it is not known that he has any capital beyond \$20 that he borrowed from an old lady. He is described as about five feet six inches in height, slim built, unshaved face, open countenance, and dressed in a light check summer suit and a low black hat. Mr. Lockwood says that he does not know that his wife had any money, unless she had been saving it up for some time in preparation for this adventure. She borrowed fifty cents of a neighbor to pay her fare on the train the day that her husband took her back. The impression prevails in Wilton that if Mrs. Lockwood should return, her husband would be glad to welcome her home again.—New York Star, June 7th.



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Second paragraph, about 2/3 the way down. The sentence starting, "The fruit of their union . . . . . should read, "The fruit of their union has been *four* children, the youngest an infant", not *three*. This infant was my grandfather, Chellis Middlebrook, born December 5<sup>th</sup> 1879. He had a brother Arthur and two sisters, Agnes Mae (or May) and Louise at this time.

Notice too that this "scandal" was first reported in the New York Sun! But the question remains, "Whatever happened to Charles O. Middlebrook and his sister-in-law, Antoinette Beers Lockwood?" I have checked all possible sources (to my knowledge) to which I have access, but to no avail. I have even tried a search of different names I felt he could have taken to hide his identity, but no luck. "The South" is a big place and I know many Middlebrooks are there. Perhaps someone reading this has further information or suggestions to help me learn more about him. I may very-well have cousins we've not accounted for.

Respectfully submitted,  
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