

## **Judge Holland Middleton Bell**

Holland Middleton Bell was the Probate Judge of Fayette County during the time the town of Fayette Court House/Fayetteville boomed, then in the latter part of his tenure, ceased to exist. He presided in that office while the Georgia Pacific Railroad was built, the new town called Latona was created, and the Fayette County Courthouse relocated.

Judge Bell was born on June 25, 1839 in Tuscaloosa County, the fifth of ten children born to Anthony F. and Elizabeth Middleton Bell. He was perhaps one of the most distinguished persons ever to reside in Fayette County because of the important role his family had in the development of Colonial America and with Kings of England. The Middleton family lineage has been traced from Scotland to Maryland, Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, Tuscaloosa and Fayette, Alabama.

Among his distant relatives was John Middleton who was born in Scotland in 1608, and who was given the title as the first Earl of Middleton of Caldham, Scotland, by King Charles I, King of England, Scotland and Ireland. John fought valiantly for King Charles and was captured trying to rescue the king from the Tower of London. A vote of Parliament had ordered the King beheaded during a civil unrest in the kingdom brought about by religious differences. John Middleton escaped and fled to France but finally returned to Scotland. Because of his loyalty and support for King Charles I against the English Parliament and his continued support to King Charles II, John was named Commander-in-Chief of Scotland, Governor of Edinburgh Castle and Commissioner to the Scottish Parliament.

John's son and heir Charles Middleton, the second Earl of Middleton was a supporter of King James II, brother and heir of King Charles II. Middleton was suspected of being unfriendly to the Government and was arrested and imprisoned in the Tower of London. He was released on bail whereupon he crossed over to France and joined the court of the exiled King James II. He was tried for high treason in absentia and lost his titles. However, the will of King James II gave Charles Middleton the peerage titles of the Viscount of Clemont and the Earl of Monmouth.

The Maryland Lineage Society lists the Middletons as one of colonial Maryland's "first families", arriving in the 1630's. Judge Bell's great-great-grandfather, William Middleton, appears in Maryland records as being two years old in 1687 when he was gifted with property by his Godfather. William married the widow Mrs. Elizabeth Teares Keech and they had seven children, Holland Middleton being the second son, born in 1713.

William Middleton amassed thousands of acres of land in Maryland and was a member of the Lower House of Maryland Assembly under English rule representing Charles County, Maryland for 9 years, from 1732-1741. He also served for 10 years as "one of his Lordship's Justices of the Peace".

After the death of William, records show that Holland and his younger brothers moved first to Fairfax Co., Virginia (1750's) and later to South Carolina (1760's). Holland then

relocated his family to Georgia.

As dissent arose among the colonies toward the King of England, the Middletons knew they could lose their wealth and property if they joined forces against the crown. However, like their ancestors before them they risked everything and stood by their principles and chose to support the patriots of the American colonies.

A cousin of Judge Bell, Arthur Middleton, of Middleton Place, South Carolina, was a wealthy planter and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Arthur Middleton along with 10 others was appointed to draft the first Constitution of the United States of America. Despite his age of 63, Holland Middleton served as a captain in the 1776 American Revolution. His brother Robert was a colonel and his brother Hugh was a major.

Holland Middleton sired ten children with two wives. After his death Holland Middleton's family moved to Tuscaloosa Co., Alabama in 1818 and later settled in Panola County in Mississippi Territory.

Holland's fourth child and principle heir was Zacharias Middleton, born in 1774, and the grandfather of Judge Bell. Zacharias married Mary Livingstone in Clarke Co., Ga. He fought in the War of 1812. He and Mary were among the members of Holland's family who moved to Tuscaloosa in 1818 and later relocated to Mississippi. Zacharias died in 1849 in Panola County.

Elizabeth Middleton was the mother of Judge Holland Middleton Bell and the oldest of ten children born to Zacharias and Mary L. Middleton. Elizabeth was eight years old (b. 1810) when the family moved to Tuscaloosa She married Anthony F. Bell in 1829 in Tuscaloosa, Co., and they became the parents to ten children. One of Judge Bell's brothers, William Bell, was a member of the State Legislature from Fayette County in 1844-45 and was noted as a Methodist-Episcopal minister of "fair talent". Judge Bell's uncle, James Middleton, was also a representative for Fayette Co. in the 1861-62.

Anthony Bell's family was among the earliest pioneers of this area. They came from Pennsylvania to South Carolina, then in 1816 settled in the land that was to become Fayette County, Alabama. Anthony Bell was a tanner by trade and was elected as a County Commissioner from 1859-1863. He also served as a Justice of the Peace in the county in 1862 and was elected to the office of Fayette County Treasurer in 1874.

The fifth of the ten children, Holland Middleton Bell was born in 1839. He was educated in both public and private schools until he was 21 years of age. In 1860, he entered the LaGrange Military College in Franklin Co, Alabama. At LaGrange, the fee of \$112.50 covered the cost of tuition, washing, fuel, lights, medical attention, a bedstead, mattress, a table and one chair for each five-month session.

According to John Allen Wyeth, M.D., who was also a cadet during that time and wrote

the *History of LaGrange College & Military Academy and the Cadet Corps 1857-1862* (published in 1907), Holland Bell was first in his class of fifty-six members in grades and won the prize for the highest polished brasses and the cleanest rifle and accoutrements at every inspection during his 15 months tenure at the Academy. When the battles of the Civil War reached North Alabama, LaGrange College & Military Academy was destroyed in 1863 by Union forces.

In April of 1862, Bell enlisted in Company H of the 41<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry, CSA, as a private but was soon promoted to sergeant major of his regiment. As the war progressed, he attained the ranks of 1st lieutenant and captain. Bell's company fought at the major battles of Murfreesboro, Jackson and Chickamauga. He was transferred to the Army of Virginia and engaged in all the battles of that army until he was captured at Hatcher's Run in March of 1865. After his capture, he was taken to Washington where he was held for eight days before he was transferred to a Federal prison at Johnson's Island. He was kept at Johnson's Island for two months and paroled at the end of the war.

After his release, Captain Holland Bell returned to Fayette County. In 1866 he married Margarette Miles, a native of Georgia. They produced seven children, all of which predeceased Judge Bell.

Bell was elected Circuit Clerk of Fayette County in 1874 and elected Probate Judge in 1880, an office he held until 1892. He also worked as a clerk in the Probate Office for 42 years. He was a well loved citizen of this county.

In June of 1904, Dr. Wyeth wrote Judge Bell for information about himself for the book he was writing on the history of LaGrange College. Judge Bell responded, "I am still at Fayette, Alabama, sober as a judge, weigh one hundred and forty pounds, and can walk four miles an hour. I will be sixty five years old the day after tomorrow if I live until then." Judge Holland Middleton Bell died on April 11, 1943, just 2 months shy of his 105<sup>th</sup> birthday.

