

# MIDDLETON & SON CORRALS TRADITION IN RANCHING

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He came to Lubbock on horseback in 1898, and his family has been here ever since.

For Charles Middleton, founder of Charles S. Middleton & Son, Lubbock in the early days was a place where ranchers gathered and cattle was sold.

It was romantic time - a time when deals were made with a simple handshake.

Two generations later, the Middleton name lives on in his grandson Sam, who spends his time appraising thousands of acres of land involving farms and ranches in Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico.

Middleton & Son no longer sells cattle, but it may know of a ranch or two that's up for sale.

It is a reputation that Sam, and his father, Lee, now retired at 80, have carried on since Charles Middleton passed away in 1955.

Charles Middleton came to Lubbock from Louisiana and was soon appointed the town's first police chief.

But it was the sale of cattle and ranches that made the Middleton name.

"We handled a lot of cattle through here," Lee recalled. "I've often thought that there weren't many people around who knew as many people. as my father. He shipped cattle all over the country."

Charles Middleton was also a good friend of W.D. Johnson, then chairman of the Kansas City Life Insurance Co., which made loans to farmers and ranchers living in Texas, New Mexico and eastern Arizona.

But life wasn't always easy.

Lee recalled The Great Depression and one of his father's loans being called in - taking his last remaining sheep while father and son stayed at a hotel in Colorado City.

"My dad reached down into his watch pocket, pulled out a \$20 bill and said, 'Son, that's the last one.' "

Charles Middleton soon found himself running a gas station, while Lee washed and eventually drove buses for the Texas-New Mexico-Oklahoma bus line.

The two, along with Lee's sister Mary Louise, eventually got back on their feet and back to their first love - cattle and ranches.

The Middletons eventually were forced out of the cattle business with the coming of auction barns, but there were still plenty of ranches to sell.

The family, with the help of insurance companies, eventually made loans to those wanting to purchase some land.

In the early 1970s, Lee's son Sam entered the family business, but he was more interested in appraising, rather than selling farms and ranches.

"I started out doing (selling) a few ... Now the appraisal part of our business is very substantial. I still sell farm and ranch properties, but from a volume standpoint we do appraisals," Sam said. Like his grandfather, Sam has seen economic up and downs, including Texas' huge real estate bust that was brought on by the troubled oil and gas industry.

"I saw the bottom fall out. We went through a period where a lot farms and ranches went bankrupt. I was fooled by (the value of) a piece of land that kept going up in price," he said.

Since the bust, Sam says land prices now are realistically driven by the demand for commodities grown on them, such as cotton.

Sam says he doesn't care for all the red tape that goes into selling a piece of land, including all the attorneys and regulations that have to be followed. "But this is what I want to do because I love this business," he said.