



Sam Middleton, Boone Pickens

AT THE MESA VISTA RANCH. Sam Middleton (right) was an integral part of the team that worked with T. Boone Pickens (left) to perfect his Panhandle ranch. He subsequently co-listed and sold the Mesa Vista with Monte Lyons at Hall and Hall.

Chas. S. Middleton and Son Celebrates a Century

By Eric O'Keefe

In 1898, Charlie Middleton arrived in Lubbock a decade before the city was founded. Today, Sam Middleton and his son Charlie are more than happy to leave town — just as long as it's to show one of their brokerage's marquee listings.

With his straw hat, pressed shirt, and creased Wranglers, Sam Middleton comes across like a rancher, not an innovator. Yet 50 years ago, he oversaw a drastic change at his family's brokerage that set it on a trajectory to market some of America's best-known ranches including the Waggoner, the Four Sixes, the UU Bar, the Matador, and the Frying Pan.

Known as "Little Sam" growing up, he studied at Texas Tech, got his appraisal license, and joined his father, "Big Sam," at Chas. S. Middleton and Son, which his grandfather founded in 1920.

“My dad would go look at a ranch, take some notes, and make a crude map of the place. He kept a file of these different ranches in a three-ring notebook. He didn’t have any of them listed, but that didn’t prevent him from being a very successful broker,” he says.

Maintaining a large inventory of these hip-pocket listings was the secret of Big Sam’s success. He called this inventory “a buckshot presentation.”

The Days of Open Listings

Little Sam soon found out that this informal business model had several major drawbacks.

“You didn’t have any protection. None,” he says. “I remember a classic example of this from 1973. Dad and I had lined up buyers for these different tracts. We had one left. I knew this guy, and I thought, ‘Man, this will fit him great.’ I called him and told him about it. He said, ‘I appreciate your telling me this. Carl Meek is my broker. I’ll give him a call and have him show me the ranch.’”

“Did that buyer do something wrong going to Carl?” Middleton asks. “No, he didn’t. Carl was his broker. Did Carl do something wrong by working with that fellow? Not at all. That man was his client. The only ones who did something wrong were Dad and me. We should have made sure we had that property listed.” There was one other substantial drawback to the open listing approach.

“A serious buyer, a big player, does not want to waste his time to go look at a ranch unless he knows you’ve got it tied up and you can perform. If you get out there, and he finds out you don’t have it listed, and you don’t know whether the guy will take a certain price, he’s wasting his time. And his time is valuable,” Middleton says.

“So I told my dad, I said, ‘We’ve got to start getting these listings on an exclusive basis.’ And he told me, ‘You just can’t do that in this business.’ It was difficult to get exclusive listings because it hadn’t been done in our part of the world. But I stood my ground,” Middleton says.



THREE GENERATIONS Jed, Big Sam, Little Sam, and Charlie Middleton.

Exclusive Listings

Plenty of bumps in the road ensued. “As I got more and more active in the business, I missed some deals. But finally, it became more and more accepted,” he says.

“When you get an exclusive listing, you can afford to put together a decent marketing proposal and spend some money on advertising. I may not have had 50 deals like my dad did, but the five or six I had I knew cold. We had good maps and good brochures with detailed information. That’s what buyers want,” he says.

The results speak for themselves. “Because of this, our success ratio went way up. If you have a ranch listed right, you have a pretty good chance of selling the place,” he says.

Boone Pickens ranks as Sam Middleton’s top client. From marketing sections of the Four Sixes that Pickens acquired from Anne Marion to assembling the 64,809-acre [Mesa Vista Ranch](#), they did 28 transactions. After Pickens acquired a 2,900-acre bank-owned tract in 1971, Middleton, working with Pickens and Ron Bassett, helped to stitch together the latter holding.

Land Report 100er D.K. Boyd is another longtime client and close friend. D.K. famously told his wife, T.J., that if he were ever to die in the field on one of his ranches, her first call should not be to his ranch manager.

“Call Sam Middleton,” he said.

Selling a Scharbauer Ranch

Middleton did nine ranch sales with Clarence Scharbauer, another legendary Midlander. One in particular stands out: a 32-section tract in Goldsmith just west of Odessa.

"It was covered up in production. I'm going to say there were 1,400 oil wells on this ranch. That's all it was — an oil field," Middleton says. "There was so much activity on the ranch that the Scharbauers hadn't ranched it in 15 or 20 years. Clarence asked me if I could sell the surface rights for \$85 an acre. This was back in the early 1980s. When he asked me if anybody would want to buy the ranch, I said, 'How about Chevron?' Every one of those wells belonged to Chevron Production Company. He said, 'See what you can do.'"

Middleton had more in mind than just cold-calling the Chevron office. His first call was to a rancher in Midland named Tom Linebery. According to Middleton, Linebery was notorious in the Permian Basin for making oil companies pay exorbitant surface damages and right-of-way fees.

"He just beat them to death," Middleton says.

Middleton called Linebery and laid out his plan. "Tom, that old ranch Clarence has got over there at Goldsmith, do you mind if I use your name?" he asked. "Chevron's got all the production, and I want to scare them into thinking that you're going to buy the ranch."

"Man, I'd love for you to use my name," Linebery replied.

So the young broker called the Chevron Regional Office at Midland and secured an appointment with the head of the regional division. When the day came, he drove down to Midland and walked into the plush office, saw the receptionist, and announced himself. He was told to have a seat. The moment he was ushered into the executive's office, he knew the man had no idea who he was.

"I walked in and told him I was Sam Middleton, and I have that Scharbauer Ranch for sale at Goldsmith. I came to sell Chevron the surface of that ranch," Middleton says.

"He looked at me, and he said, 'Young man, we're in the oil business. We're not in the ranching business. We don't have any interest in the surface rights at all.'"

"And I said, 'That's OK. I just wanted to give you first opportunity. I've already talked to Tom Linebery, and Tom's very interested in the deal.' The Chevron man countered, 'Please don't talk to Linebery. Give me three days. Can you come back down here on Thursday?' And I said, 'I'll be here.' Three days later, I walked into his office, and he said, 'We've got a deal. We're going to buy it. And by the way, what's the price?' I told him \$85 an acre. He said, 'Draw up the contract.'"

Founded by Charlie Middleton

That's just one of many stories Sam and the Middletons can share. The brokerage was begun by Sam's grandfather, Charlie, who rode into Lubbock on horseback in 1898 and became the city's first police chief. But in his heart, Charlie Middleton was a cattleman. He traded cattle, brokered cattle, and ended up brokering ranches. In 1920, he founded what would become [Chas. S. Middleton and Son](#). Sam's father joined the family business in the 1930s. Sam signed on in 1971. And Sam's son Charlie came on board in 2000.

Charlie's specialty is recreational properties. Recently, he took his two boys hunting in Northern New Mexico at the Philmont Scout Ranch. Did they like being on the old UU Bar, you ask?

Liked it? They loved it. Why? Because they're Middletons.



MEET THE MIDDLETONS Patricia and Sam (center) with their son Jed (far left), a full-time rancher, and his wife, Haley, and their daughters Kolie and Abby. Son Charlie (far right) is a broker who works with his father and is shown here with his wife, Jennifer, and their children Miller, Macoy, and Morgan.