

Middleton, Stephen P. Letter Book

Stephen P. Middleton Letter Book and Diary

1880-1881, 1886-1893

Title Statement

Middleton, Stephen P. Letter BookGuide to the Stephen P. Middleton Letter Book and Diary MS 00018

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Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

MS 00018

Unit ID

/repositories/2/resources/2506

Unit Date

1880-1881, 1886-1893

Language

English

Extent

0.03 Linear Feet

Repository

Special Collections Research Center

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access:

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Acquisition Information:

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Processing Information:

Accessioned and minimally processed in October and November 2009 by Ute Schechter.

Preferred Citation:

Stephen P. Middleton Letter Book and Diary, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

Biographical Information:

Information about this individual or organization may be available in the Special Collections Research Center Wiki: http://scdbwiki.swem.wm.edu/wiki/index.php/Stephen_P._Middleton.

Scope and Contents

Acc. 2009.492: Volume of copies of outgoing correspondence of Stephen P. Middleton of Norristown, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania for the years 1886-1892. The front cover is labeled 'Copy 1886-1892' and the first page is titled "Time Account of Stephen P. Middleton of Norristown, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, wrote October 18th, 1886."

The first 3 pages were begun in 1880-1881 as an account of time worked and earnings, but starting on page 4 the author copied his outgoing letters. Letters are both of a private and professional nature and often concern Middleton's search for work. He is also interested in competitive ice skating and is looking for someone to support him in his athletic ambitions. In other places he talks about working in a sawmill and brickyard and toward the end to the volume he is looking for work as machinist or engineer.

On the last page, on February 24, 1891 Middleton writes: "It surprises me that I was ever so overcome by misery vc [?] as to write such nonsense as I have written in this book. Wild ravings of one unfortunate brought low by misery. No principle in acting or writing." Some of the copied letters have comments written across the filled-in pages, e.g. "Foolish weakness", "Nonsense" or "Returned" Received". etc.

There is an alphabetical index of recipients in the back of the volume as well as a clipping about competitive skating.

Acc. 2009.518: In this Diary, 1890-1893 Stephen P. Middleton, who is living with his parents and siblings, describes his various jobs, being out of work, as well as social activities. He is very active in sports. Also included are YMCA sports programs.

For a more detailed description and excerpts, both provided by the seller, please see folder links below.

Keywords

Clippings (information artifacts)

Diaries

Letter books

Programs

Pennsylvania--Economic conditions--19th century

Pennsylvania--Social life and customs--19th century

Skating--United States--History--19th century

YMCA of the USA--History

Young men--Conduct of life

Young men--United States--Diaries

Young men--United States--Social conditions--19th century

Physical Characteristics or Technical Requirements:

The fragile nature of this material may limit handling.

Diary, 1890-1893, has been cleaned of mold, but mold stains are still present throughout the pages.

Description of Subordinate Components

Letter Book

Unit ID id62000

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/224770

Unit Date 1880-1892

Mixed Materials 1 (box)

Container 1 (Folder)

Scope and Contents

There are 190 pages of letters and an index in the back. In the beginning, he leaves home after fighting with his father and tries to make a way for himself. He had been working in a Saw Mill, which he did not like, and tries other jobs, such as night watchman, and later works in a brickyard. He confides to one of his brothers of his love for his cousin Lizzie, talks of going out west and then to Texas, but later ends up returning home. There, he seems desperate to find a job he likes or some kind of adventure and even writes to Henry Stanley in Zanzibar, Africa, asking for work. He also submits some pieces to magazines asking them to publish them, and also writes to colleges about their Civil Engineering courses. He is very interested in athletics, including skating and baseball. " "Some examples of letters include: "Oct 11, 1886 - To my sister Mattie: Dear Sister: Forgive me for leaving you the way I did, but can you guess how hard it was for me to leave. In going away I done what I thought was for the best. I hope I done right. You know what disagreeable things happened with Poppy and myself sometimes. Wasn't it best that that should be stopped. Did you know how everything seemed to go wrong with me making me dissatisfied, discouraging and sometimes driving me about to desperation. You know how I got to using bad words. That wasn't the worse. I got to swearing. I done wrong and I knew it, but when I was mad I didn't care much for that. I felt myself growing worse and worse. And I do believe that if I stayed there until I finished my trade and if everything went on at the rate it has been going, I would have become a drunkard or something equally bad. I thought if I would get away, the thought of home and loved ones there would help me fight against evil (and it will). I got sick, not sick enough to lay in bed all the time, but too sick to work, and Monday morning when Poppy called up the steps the way he did, I felt as if (as I told Georgie) for a quarter I would go away. Can you imagine the torture I went through the rest of the week. I didn't make up my mind to go until Saturday and even then I didn't know I would go until I was off. And now it is done. Don't worry about me Mattie, it might have been worse. Forgive me. God bless you. Good-bye. Your loving brother, Stevie. January 15, 1887 Dear Father: I suppose you are looking for an answer from me before this. I have been up to Roaring Branch and just got back on the 13th. Joey was about to send your letter to me. I don't think I lost much of a job at the Hotel either. I think I am too much afraid of being imposed upon because if anybody does the least thing out of the road, it seems hard for me to let it go without paying them back for it. Of course its a wrong...., but I don't know I must be proud I guess. I am very glad to hear you are better. Are you working yet? I started away from here on the 4th to hunt for work up there, but I believe its taken more experienced men for lumbering this time of the year, as it is pretty dangerous. I did help saw and split some wood at Thomacer, but that's not the kind of work I mean is and that only lasted a day or two. I suppose Georgie told you about how the place is. I liked the weather there a great deal better than here. I walked from Roaring Branch to Trout Run on Monday afternoon, about 15 miles. At Trout Run I heard of a man in from Texas who was gathering some young fellows together to take out there for herding cattle. I wanted to see him and waited there until Wednesday, when I started away and seen he was on the same train I was. I spoke to him about it at Willimsport. His offer is pretty good if he is honest. He says: I pay him \$10 down for my fare from Lock Haven to Texas, where I could work the other \$10 out when I am free to go where I please or pay the full \$20 down at once and leave anytime. He says though he don't want the money but wants the man. He furnishes rifle, revolver, buckskin suit, pony saddle and bridle and says if I don't like the country he would send me back free of charge. Offers \$40 a month and board at first, afterward, between that and \$75. He says its not as much danger out there as some people make it out to be and that there is more danger in straying off with the herd, getting lost on the Prairie and meeting with Indians. They would rob you but would not hurt you. He says he wants fellows that don't drink nor swear, etc. Honest, sober, industrious young men. The man may be honest and all that, but it's risky business. I

walked from Williamsport to with him. There I gave him 25 cents to telegraph to me at Pottersville to know if he had enough men. He took it and invited me over to a restaurant where we each had a plate of Oysters. We come from there to Northumberland where he paid for my night's lodging and my breakfast. We went to Church that night there. He asked me to go, he offered to buy me an overcoat if I wanted on and when I left him, offered me money if I hadn't enough. He said he would telegraph to me yesterday, but I rec'd none yet. Maybe he intends to come here if he does and Joey likes him, I may go. I would have liked to talked to you about it and liked you to see him. He gives his name as George W. Wilson, Harrisonville, Harrison Co., Texas. Says he was a Preacher but had to give it up on account of his health. I doubt whether I'll ever see him again. I think he is either honest or else playing a very deep game. I intend to start for Nebraska in two or three weeks if nothing happens and I have the money. I would like to see you all first, but I can't trust myself home. when I go home, I want to stay there. When I was up at I seen an Electric Battery and thinking you may be interested in it, I will try to give you a description of it. the old man said he made it about 60 years ago when he was 20 years old (a little drawing is there). Now I don't know what they are but I'll given them as I suppose: 1 & 5 cloth & for friction. 2: glass cylinder. 3: conductors. 4: crank. Then he have different little things such as showing the effect of lightening rods in lightening. Good by. Your loving son Stevie. Tell Tommy to write. April 25, 1889 - To Mr. Henry M. Stanley, Zanzibar, Africa. Dear Sir: I hope you will excuse the liberty I take in writing this way to an entire stranger. If I am not mistaken, you know what this country is in regards to wages, etc. I understand you used to live hereabouts. Wages and work here is cut & dried and seems to be little chance for a poor young man. He must work hard and steady and he will not get a sum of money layed up until late in life (perhaps too late to enjoy it) indeed he will be lucky if he ever lays enough up to retire. And to one craving adventure now and then, this sort of life continually is all the harder. There is not enough adventure of the kind I like around here to find out what there is in me, there may be very little in me for all I know. If one could by a mighty burst of pluck, skill, daring and strength gain both his fame and fortune, I would like to be that person. I would not want to forsake this country, not even for 5 or 10 years, unless I was sure of coming back rich or at least well fixed. I am poor as I have hinted. I have not enough money to come there, if I was sure of prospering. Is there business chances in that country that would satisfy me? What do you pay your men on an expedition? What chances for getting a fortune are there? I don't want you to think any boyish novel-reading fancy induced me to write to you. If the outlook over there over-balances the circumstances here, my intentions are to come when I can. Your sincere well wishes...."

Diary

Unit ID id63055

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/224771

Unit Date 1890-1893

Mixed Materials 1 (box)

Container 2 (Folder)

Scope and Contents

June 19, 1890 - This afternoon we did not have work at the brickyard on account of fixing the rolle. Today there was a reunion of some of America at Valley Forge. I walked up there this afternoon. September 8th - This morning, Tommy, Ed Beidman and I went out to the Globe Park ball grounds, where we had a game of Kock-out. Elmer playing with us for awhile. This afternoon, Cora and Edie and Ed Beidmann, John Fretz, Tommy and I went out boating. We went to Catfish Dam. Had a pleasant time. The water and weather was clear and pleasant. Oct. 12 - The small insignificant things written in these books are not always written as much for their worth as they are to recall something else. People or circumstances and even frame of mind that I was in at that time. January 14, 1891 - They are having a great time with the Sioux Indians out west this winter. They have left their Reservation and there have been fighting with some killed on both sides. May 3, 1891 - The Norristown Baseball gounds at Oak View is fixed up in reasonable good condition this year. George was thrown out of work for a week. Him, Tommy, elmer and I seen a game between the Norristown & Richmond of Phila. Norristown beat them 18 to 0. I believe the Norristown had Granlick, Owens, Cox, Foulbrod and Valee playing. May 17 - There was Circus in town yesterday. It was Robbin's Circus. It didn't seem to be much account. They had no street parade. They had a few free exhibitions. This afternoon, I took a walk down around the Circus grounds at Franklin Avenue and then to the river to Camp grounds where they expected to have a game of ball, but no one was there. I went out o he brikyard, there was game between Norristown and Cooling. Norristown beat them 8 to 4. Joe Hartman pitched for Norristown. He seems to have luck. He had a good many strike outs, yet he appears to play a poor game. August 11, 1891 - Mattie came home last night. There was some excitement across the way last night at Wolfingers. Mr. Wofinger is a conductor on the railway and I believe does not get home till after 12 at night. Somewhere around 11 Mrs. Woflinger discovered a man in her room she thought it was her husband and went to get a light to see, when the man grabbed her and choked her and after quite a tussle he escaped. Jan 28, 1893 - Yesterday afternoon I was down to the gym. They are trying to organize a baseball team for next season and want George, Tommy and I to join it. June 7, 1893 - I was down at a gymnasium on Lafayette St tonight. Clarence Miller invited me down to see him take a boxing lesson. He is taking lessons

off of a fellow by the name of Draper.