

Chosen exile: The life and times of Septima Sexta Middleton Rutledge, American cultural pioneer



The life of Septima Sexta Middleton Rutledge spanned that period of American history from the close of the Revolution to the desolate finish of the War Between the States. Septima Sexta Middleton and Henry Middleton Rutledge, first cousins and children of Arthur Middleton and Edward Rutledge (South Carolina signers of the Declaration of Independence), were married on Septimas sixteenth birthday, October 15, 1799. In 1816, they and their five children left the security of Charleston friends and family to establish a county seat on the Elk River in Franklin County, Tennessee. Their plantation Chilhowee, was on a portion of the 73,000 acre Revolutionary War grants which belonged to Henrys father, Edward. By 1820 they also built a grand home in Nashville, Tennessee, where they frequently entertained such notable friends as Rachel and Andrew Jackson, Sarah and James K. Polk, Sam Houston, and others. LaFayette was their guest during his tour in 1825. They and their children became a significant part of a cultural pioneering influence which brought into existence religious, educational, and charitable institutions throughout their well respected, much loved citizens, whose tangible and intangible contributions to the development of Nashville and Middle Tennessee have rarely been equalled. They brought a touch of old world colonial charm, dignity, and refinement into their chosen exile and then combined their love of God with rugged principle and determination to forge a new society. The story of Septima Sexta Middleton Rutledge stands not only as a replica and symbol of the past but also as an irreplaceable model for the future.

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