

S. Jennie Sorg, National Bank President

By Karl Sanford Kabelac

MIDDLETOWN, OHIO, WHICH HAD A POPULATION OF 9,200 in 1900, is located between Dayton and Cincinnati in the southwestern part of the state. As the 20th Century dawned, the Sorg Family of Middletown was the wealthiest in the community. Their imposing mansion in the city had been completed in 1888. The Sorg Opera House, giving the community a beautiful meeting and entertainment space, had opened in 1891.

Paul J. Sorg, who was born in 1840, made his fortune in tobacco. He had served as a United States Congressman in the 1890s, and was president of The Merchants National Bank of Middletown (charter #2025), founded in 1872.

Susan Jennie Gruver, a native of the small community of Millville, about fifteen miles from Middletown, married Sorg on July 20, 1876. She was some 15 years younger than he was, having been born on December 1, 1855. They had two children, a son Paul Arthur (1878-1913) and a daughter Ada (1882-1956).

With Paul J. Sorg's death in 1902, the young Paul Arthur Sorg became president of the bank. A few years later, William L. Dechant, who was in charge of the Sorg estate, succeeded him.



S. Jennie Sorg about 1900. (Courtesy Middletown [Ohio] Public Library, George C. Crout Collection.)

Woman Made Bank President.

HAMILTON, O., Jan. 18.—Mrs. Jennie Gruver Sorg, widow of the late Paul J. Sorg, a millionaire congressman and one of the largest tobacco manufacturers in the state, was elected president of the Merchants' National bank, one of the largest institutions in Middletown. She will succeed former Judge William L. De Chant. Mr. De Chant formerly was manager of the Sorg estate.

Dechant was "deposed" (as a local paper termed it) from his role in the Sorg estate in January 1908. At what must have been a tumultuous annual meeting of the bank that month, a new board of directors was elected and the next day they chose S. Jennie Sorg as president of the bank. Her presidency, though, was short, for by the September 1909

Opposite: A number of newspapers in the country carried the news of her January 1908 election as president of the bank. This is the notice from the Ogdensburg, NY paper.



Series 1882 Brown Back signed by Paul J. Sorg as president. (Heritage Auctions Archives)



A downtown Middletown view, c. 1910. The Merchants National Bank (front left) stood on the corner of Main and 3rd Street. The First National Bank (front right) stood across the street.

Comptroller of the Currency's annual survey, J. W. Boyd had succeeded her.

Mrs. Sorg lived the rest of her life in Middletown and New York City. It was in the latter city that she died on August 21, 1930 as the result of an automobile accident. She was entombed in the Sorg family mausoleum in Woodside Cemetery in Middletown. The main part of her estate, valued at almost six million dollars, went to her daughter, her one grandchild, and her one great grandchild.

Sources and acknowledgements

As it proved difficult to locate relevant Middletown newspapers, I consulted those from Hamilton, Ohio, which is the county seat. Short articles on the election of Mrs. Sorg as president of the bank appeared in *The Hamilton Evening Journal* for January 15, 1908, and *The Republican News* for January 16, 1908. The story was then carried nationally and appeared in various other U.S. newspapers. Articles on her tragic death appeared in *The Hamilton Evening Journal* for August 21 and 22, 1930, and a detailed article on the settlement of her estate appeared in the same newspaper for October 28, 1931. Wikipedia has an informative entry for Paul J. Sorg, the founder of the family fortune. The help of Roger Miller of the Middletown Pubic Library is gratefully acknowledged. ♦

Postcard views showing Paul J. Sorg, creator of the family fortune; the Sorg mansion in Middletown; and the family mausoleum where S. Jennie Sorg is entombed.

