

1914 student elopement raises eyebrows all over town

It was a different time. Readers of the microfilm of the *Bloomington Telephone* for 1914 may feel they have just dropped down the rabbit hole in Alice in Wonderland.

On Feb. 20 the newspaper reported in a larger-than-the-others headline that said, "I.U. Bride and Groom May Ask Re-Instatement" Whatever did that mean?

Well, the two had the nerve to elope during the school year. The *Telephone* explained. "The truth is Tommie (Featherstone) pulled off his marriage with too much publicity."

Just how the university administration found out about the elopement is spelled out in the story. "...and when he brought his blushing bride back to town the girls at Alpha Hall gave them a big 'rice' reception."

What was wrong with that was that there was some concern among university officials that the elopement would be "catching." In other words, it would give ideas to students who were fond of each other.

By the time the story hit the front page of the *Telephone*, the young couple were appar-



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

ently on the verge of appealing their dismissal from the university. It was explained, "Friends of Mr. and Mrs. Tommie Featherstone, the Indiana University couple who were 'let out' because they eloped and were married, say they may make a determined fight for reinstatement to the University and express indignation at the treatment accorded them."

Continued the newspaper, "Mr. and Mrs. Tommie were let out by a committee ... and it is likely President (William Lowe) Bryan will be asked to set aside the action of this committee."

In the same edition of the *Telephone* (Feb. 20, 1914) there was another article about the unfortunate couple. The second one was on

the back page of the four-page newspaper.

"Mr. and Mrs. Tommie Featherstone, Who Eloped Monday, are Sent Home to Explain to Papa and Mamma" said that headline. Obviously, the reporter was trying to be clever when he or she wrote, "The authorities at the University have dealt Dan Cupid a knock-out blow by sending home Mr. and Mrs. Tommie Featherstone, the young people who eloped up the Monon Monday and returned to Bloomington as man and wife."

At that point the readers were to learn the name of the bride. It was Mary Hamilton of Greenfield. Her new husband's parents lived in Inglesfield.

Chirped the *Telephone* reporter, "Hereafter no brilliant youth and beautiful maiden, who have been holding their hands, can borrow a dollar, get married and life happily thereafter at Indiana. Dan Cupid is notified to amble on his way."

It was obvious to some deeper thinkers among the newspapers readers that the action was taken by the faculty committee

with an eye on future enrollment statistics. It was spelled out in the article. "The University authorities took the action, it is said, because they were afraid an epidemic of the thing might break out and it would cause parents to place their pretty daughters in some other school."

The newspaper publicity didn't help the cause of the young couple, either. The university officials apparently didn't see anything romantic about the elopement.

How did the couple meet in the first place? Well, IU's enrollment was much smaller then, and they could have met most anywhere on the campus. As it happens, they met in the Henry & Kerr restaurant, where Tommie was a waiter. His future bride often ate there, according to the *Telephone*.

It is unlikely that Mr. and Mrs. Tommie Featherstone got any satisfaction out of an appeal to the university officials. Their names are not listed among the graduates for 1914 or any other year.

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