

How courtship almost led to a court suit in 1895 in Bloomington

There was a time when Bloomington attorneys could expect to get some experience in trying breach of promise suits in the court. In the earliest days of the Monroe Circuit Court thwarted lovers frequently called upon the legal system to punish others who appeared to be fickle or irresponsible.

Even at the 19th century drew to a close, Hoosiers had recourse in the courts when they felt they had been misled in the ways of courtship. A case in point was the threatened suit on behalf of Miss Ola Bowles of Bloomington.

It should be noted at the outset of her story that the young lady was a trifle young to be considering matrimony. She was 16 in 1895, when the misunderstanding arose.

Her "suitor" was Ora W. Herkless, an Indiana University student from Carthage. Upon entering IU, he had declared his intention of becoming a lawyer, but his plans apparently went awry during his relationship with Miss Bowles. His position as left end on the 1894 IU varsity football team may have been part of his charm, as far as local females were concerned.

The misunderstanding between Miss Bowles and Herkless found its way to the front of the Bloomington *Telephone* on a slow news day. "HE SKIPS! To Avoid Marriage. A Law Suit to Follow. Breach of Promise! The



Looking back

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Girl's Parents Demand Damages," screamed the headline on the front page of the newspaper. Apparently the reporter who handled the story had learned that her family considered the "insult" worth \$5,000.

Stated the *Telephone*, "It is alleged that Herkless not only promised to marry the girl, but that a note is in possession of her parents in which he asked her to run away from home with him, when they would be united in marriage. If reports are correct, the would-be groom has been committing himself on paper, and the ardor of his love and affection has dropped freely from his finger's ends, now to come up in numerous letters to remind him of his pretended devotion."

The letters were written to Miss Bowles while she was visiting her sister in Washington. At the April 16 publication of the newspapers, she and Herkless had disappeared from Bloomington, but not in each other's company. Skating along the edge of libel, the *Telephone* commented, "Acting upon this theory (that see *Courting*, Back page