

Hero Major Maddox mired in elopement, deception

Major William Wilton Maddox was in serious trouble, but it was not a simple case of supposed law-breaking. The Nov. 21, 1921, edition of the *Bloomington Telephone* could not have described the story any better. "The story is a long one — of war, hospitals, fighting, love, travel, elopement and an irate and rampant father-in-law ..."

Maddox, a veteran of World War I from New Albany, had enrolled at Indiana University in 1920. He was regarded as a hero, particularly since he was supposed to have served in France with the Rainbow Division. His limp (he said) was caused by a falling rafter in a hospital where he was recuperating from influenza, but he had been wounded several times before that. At the end of the war, he said he had served as a soldier of fortune for the Polish Army.

At IU, Maddox met another student by the name of Dorothy Hutchinson from Brazil, the daughter of a judge. Maddox had joined the Writers Club on the campus, and she was artistically-inclined, having done some work on the staff of a humor magazine by the name of the *Crimson Bull*.



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

He must have been considered a romantic figure by his fellow students and some townspeople. The *Telephone* of Nov. 16 states that Maddox was "moving in the highest society circles."

The newspaper does not relate how long the Maddox/Hutchinson courtship lasted, but they eloped to Nashville, presumably without seeking her father's advice or consent in the matter. Thereafter, Maddox's troubles began.

By November of 1921, he was being sought by police for having written two bad checks in Bloomington. As the *Telephone* put it, "Two checks are in the hands of the local officers which the Major is charged with passing — one on the Globe clothing store and the other on Miss Cross (whoever she was) — and there are said to be several others in the

community."

But Maddox and his wife were gone from Bloomington, having traveled to Mexico City. There were several stories about what he had been doing there. The *Telephone* related that "Word came back here that he had been given a commission as a general of artillery by President Obregon."

After his arrest, Maddox told a reporter that while he was in Mexico City he was "employed for a time on a newspaper, and later he went to Panama, where he again had a newspaper job." The Maddoxes suddenly resurfaced in New York City, where he said the Veterans Bureau was trying to get him admitted to Columbia University.

After Maddox and wife traveled to Washington, D.C., the Bloomington police learned where he was. They requested authorities there to arrest him, and Officer Henry Knight went to take Maddox into custody for a return to Bloomington.

In Washington, prior to Knight's arrival, the young man had received preferential treatment. "Maddox is not held in the district jail, but is detained at a precinct police station

where he has a comfortable bed and is not thrown in with other prisoners."

Maddox admitted having written the checks, but denied that there was any fraudulent intent. He referred the police to an account in a bank in New Albany. As the *Telephone* put it, "He readily recalls writing two checks, one for \$20 and the other for \$25 while still in school at Bloomington, but he says he thought he had plenty of money in the New Albany bank on which they were written."

Continued the newspaper, "He says that he directed the veterans' bureau to send his compensation checks from the government to the New Albany bank, which was done, but could not be credited to his account because the checks lacked his endorsement."

Officer Knight brought Maddox back to Bloomington on a Pullman train. Dorothy Maddox chose to travel back to Indiana separately to save herself the humiliation of being seen as the prisoner's wife. She went to Brazil, but her husband told the press that he expected her to come to Bloomington to assist in his defense or help straighten out the misunderstanding about the money.

Next week: More of the story.

H-T 5/18/98