

Divorcing women found a friend in Judge Martin

Petitioners who appeared in the 10th Judicial Circuit Court found themselves face to face with Judge William H. Martin. The Bloomington *Telephone* of Jan. 15, 1897, had a few words to describe his approach to divorce cases:

"The women find a good friend in Judge Martin when they have a just cause. On divorce day he soon made it evident that he believed that it was the duty of a husband to support the wife and treat her kindly and if the evidence of the woman was conclusive that this had not been done, a divorce soon followed."

Judge Martin, for example, had no problem in deciding what to do about the case of Sarah Lango against Edward Lango. According to the newspaper, Lango cursed her, borrowed money from her and tried to make her transfer her property to him.

On the other hand, Judge Martin was not enthusiastic about granting a divorce to a Mrs. Adams on April 6. She complained that her husband thought more about another



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

woman than he did about her and bragged about the other woman's cooking.

Explained the *Telephone*, "Judge Martin was quite certain that the woman referred to was a disturbing element, but did not see his way clear to grant the divorce and took the case under advisement." Other cases waiting on the docket were Dora Gardner vs. Charles Gardner, Calvin Beleford vs. Belle Beleford, Alfred Pinkston vs. Jennie Pinkston and Angelina Ratliffe vs. Richard Ratliffe. Mary Wilson's suit against Charles Wilson was dismissed.

Then there was the case of Mrs. Melvin Creech in January of 1897. It was enough to melt the heart of the judge. The newspaper described her complaint. "The maiden name

of Mrs. Creech was Effie Spiers, and she testified that her husband abandoned her one year ago.

"For a time they lived in Terre Haute, and she stated that while there her husband made a proposition that she assist him in blackmailing certain wealthy men by first placing herself in a compromising position with them, when he would unexpectedly appear upon the scene." Mrs. Creech got custody of their two children, a 1-year-old boy and 3-year-old girl.

Sometimes Judge Martin got a little variety in the courtroom. One of the more unusual cases that came before him involved a Civil War veteran.

Here is the way the *Telephone* of June 11, 1897, described the case to the readers. "Frank Sullivan, an old soldier, 80 years old, plead guilty to keeping a house of ill-fame but was dismissed by Prosecutor Edmondson because he thought the old man was a victim of circumstance. He had made an application for a place in the soldiers' home and Mr.

Edmondson or the Court did not think it just to have the old soldier enter the home with such a record attached to him."

Two men were arraigned for "associating with bad women." The men got a lecture from Judge Martin, who pointed out that they made the prostitution of the women an option. He pointed out that he intended to "break up such pernicious practices."

William Ray, who was divorced by his wife early in 1897 because he had been "keeping" another woman, unfortunately had another day in court. By June of that year his former wife was dead, but Ray was arrested for shooting his brother in the leg.

The judge had no patience with the man. He fined Ray \$25 and costs and moved on to other cases, some of which were check forging, assault, a damage suit against the Monon Railroad and a foreclosure.

At the end of the day, Judge Martin probably hopped on the Monon for a return trip to Bedford, where he lived when he wasn't "judging."

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