

Report on wedding in 1890s contains more details

If you began shopping for a wedding present and knew what you bought was sure to be published in the newspaper, would you buy a more expensive gift? Friends and relatives of society brides in the 1890s were faced with that dilemma.

Dr. W.W. Harris of Ellettsville married Cora Matthews of Bedford (formerly of Ellettsville) on June 17, 1891.

The account of their wedding was prominently placed by the publisher of the *Monroe County Citizen*, coincidentally a relative by the name of W.B. Harris.

Friends of the bride and bridegroom who lived in the Bloomington/Ellettsville area were obliged to travel to Bedford by buggy or train.

Some of the guests may have chosen to stay overnight in Bedford after the wedding, since it started at 7:30 p.m. and was followed by "a splendid supper."

In case the readers of the *Citizen* were curious about the finer details of the ceremony, some of them were supplied by the newspaper.

"The bride was elegantly attired in white



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

silk, cut en traine," and "The groom, in swallow-tail coat and white vest, looked his best."

The description of the participants also included some editorial comments, indicating that the author of the article was biased.

The bride "displayed a self-possession, which aided by her sweet, girlish face, won for her the highest admiration of all present. She is popular, well-educated, musical, acquainted with domestic duties; Ellettsville is her old home, and she has a large number of friends here who welcome her back."

As for the bridegroom, there was praise for him, as well.

"He passed through the 'ordeal' (presumably the wedding ceremony) with his characteristic calmness, and made no effort to conceal the fact that he was proud of his bride. Dr. Walter Harris has a good practice here, and a

good home for his wife, and the twain certainly enter upon married life with surroundings favorable to produce happiness."

The extensive list of wedding presents might have had some bearing on that future domestic felicity.

The most impressive of the gifts was "a fine, upright Voss piano" from the bride's father. As the *Citizen* quaintly put it, Mr. Matthews "had the instrument placed in the new home of his daughter, without her knowledge or consent." Since she was "musical," her consent was no doubt a given.

What is interesting about a wedding account of this particular period of time is indeed the gift list.

Some of the items have virtually disappeared from American domestic life in the years since 1891.

Who today would give the bride and new husband a lamb's down furniture duster? Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Alverson did.

Then there were the "plush head rest" from Lollie Edmondson, the pair of "tidies" from the W.A. Ramseys and Voris Norton's contribution, "an ornamental statue." In the

same category was a "fine steel engraving" from the W.M. Hodges.

The dresser scarves like the ones given by Mrs. Hopkins are not all that popular any more. On the other hand, the family Bible from the M.A. Matthews was a standard feature of every home during the Victorian period.

Readers of that period would have had no trouble identifying the "card receiver," a holdover from a more formal period of manners and social activity. The receptacle would have been placed on a small table in the front hall. It was there that the calling cards of visitors were placed. The etiquette of the calling card was extremely important at one time, since how the card, itself, was handled indicated a great deal about social class and the future intentions of the visitor.

No doubt on the morning after the wedding, there were Bloomington and Ellettsville couples who were wishing they had spent just a bit more money on their Harris/Matthews wedding present. After all, a silver fruit basket looked a lot more important than "one dozen dotties," whatever they were.

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