

Minister's wife not coy when seeking divorce

If the Bloomington gossips were looking for something titillating to talk about early in 1908, they found it right on the front page of the *Evening World* on Jan. 8. Ministers of the gospel just didn't get divorced, but one of the local ones seemed to be on the verge of that very thing.

His name? Well, he was The Rev. W.R. Williams whose denomination was the Christian Church. Actually, it was Mrs. Williams who filed the suit, and she didn't hide the nature of her complaint behind some mealy-mouthed evasions.

Explained the *Evening World*, "Alleging that her husband, Rev. William R. Williams, a minister of the Christian church, is guilty of carrying on a correspondence with, and that he has engaged in flirtations if not love-making with Jennie McGrill and diverse other women, Katie E. Williams has asked the court to dissolve the matrimonial bonds existing between the couple, give her custody of their children and \$10,000 alimony."

That certainly got the attention of the Bloomington reading public, especially when the newspaper added that the minister was worth \$25,000 and owned exten-



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

sive lands in Owen and Monroe counties. The particulars of the marriage were spelled out in the article — married Sept. 16, 1886, and separated on Dec. 23, 1907.

In her complaint, Mrs. Williams stated that "her husband has been guilty of cruel and inhuman treatment toward her for the past ten years. She declares that he was cold and indifferent and that he treated her with gross neglect. Instead of showing affection for her, she says he treated her in a way to humiliate her and put her to shame."

Continued the *Evening World*, "She charges that he has for the past ten years been extremely ill toward her, and unkind, and that upon the slightest pretext he would quarrel with her, despite her efforts to induce him to desist. Further she avers

that he threatened to strike her and did order her away from their home, telling her frequently that he would be glad if she would leave their home."

Mrs. Williams also said that the minister had promised to mend his ways, but couldn't keep his promises. She was, in short, "miserable and unhappy." The article also implies that Mrs. Williams' attorneys, Duncan & Batman, had filed a suit in the Monroe County Clerk's Office.

The Rev. Williams was out of town, but it did not take him long to become aware of her broadside attack on his character in the *Evening World*. Only three days later, he issued his own statement, also on the front page.

He dropped by the newspaper office to tell his side of the story. "On arriving here last night, I was surprised to see in your paper that Katie E. Williams had sued me for divorce, though she had threatened me before...There is nothing in her charge. The cause of all this is her jealousy."

The minister revealed that his wife had left him twice before and "counseled with lawyers," but she then returned. He claimed that Katie Williams had taunted

him about other women in and out of Bloomington — "women above suspicion."

Furthermore, Williams refuted her statement that he had promised to reform his ways. "...I had nothing to reform from, so I told her that my life could not be different from what it is. I was doing nothing and could not do less."

At the end of his chat with the newspaper at the *Evening World* Williams said flatly: "I will oppose any suit for divorce, and if we cannot live together, we can live apart without a divorce."

Suddenly, as far as the newspaper was concerned, the curtain dropped on the Williams story. In the Monroe County clerk's office there is no record of any divorce suit filed. It was as if the whole thing never happened.

On Feb. 20, 1908, the *Evening World* published a letter from Rev. Williams on an entirely different subject — the condition of Monroe County Roads.

Questions remain: What happened to the marriage, and if his attitude toward wife and family was so satisfactory, why was he absent from home from Dec. 23 (and presumably Christmas Day) to Jan. 10?

H-T 6/6/94