

Weddings were front-page news in the 1800s

"As the faithful old town clock pealed of the hour of 8 o'clock Miss Florence Payne took her seat at the piano and began playing Mendelssohn's Wedding March to which the betrothed couple marched into the center of the room and took their places under a large bell, the artistic work of Mrs. Atwater and Miss Maxwell, where, completely surrounded by friends they received the marriage ceremony, which was pronounced in a very able and impressive manner by Rev. (Amzi) Atwater."

— *The (Bloomington) Saturday Courier*, Oct. 22, 1887.

With what must have been one of the longest run-on sentences in the history of journalism, the reporter described the wedding of Ben S. Rogers and Miss Ida W. Rose. Needless to say, its prominent display indicated to the readers that it was a "society wedding."

Somewhere after the turn of the century, editors decided that social events belonged in a different part of the paper. But for the 1880s, weddings, particularly those of prominent people, were definitely front-page material.

Looking back at the account of the Rog-



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

ers-Rose ceremony is like looking into your grandmother's three-cornered cupboard with its old-fashioned treasures. For, you see, the wedding account contained not only details of the ceremony, but also the names of all of the guests and their gifts.

Perhaps some members of Bloomington's "upper crust" got a lot of smug satisfaction at having "one-upped" others as far as generosity was concerned. There may have been others who experienced some dismay in regard to the relatively lower costs of their own presents.

What stands out in the article is how much times have changed as far as gifts are concerned. Take for example the two "card receivers" given to the new Mr. and Mrs. Rogers. Obviously they were intended to go

on a front hallway table to hold the calling cards of visitors.

Napkin rings are seldom given today, although they are making a comeback in popularity. Then there were the two toothpick holders, one silver, the other hand-painted.

Silver table service pieces and the silver tea set were no doubt most welcome, as well as impressive. Ditto the 15-volume set of books by Charles Dickens and even the hair brush.

It should be noted at this point that 200 persons had been invited to the wedding, and, as the *Courier* noted, 185 were present. Out-of-town guests who were in attendance were described as having come to Bloomington "from abroad" — Iuka, Kansas; Danville, Ill.; Arkansas City, Ark.; New Albany and Erie, Ind.

No wedding account would be complete without a description of the bride and bridegroom's clothes, and the one in the *Courier* was no exception. "The bride was dressed in white albatross trimmed in crystal beads, presenting a lovely appearance. The groom wore a neat-fitting suit of conventional black."

In another enthusiastic run-on sentence, the newspaper related, "Early in the evening the friends of the contracting parties began gathering at the home of the bride which was neatly decorated in a manner in keeping with her good taste, and long before the appointed hour the spacious parlors at her home were filled to their utmost capacity and many were compelled to stand in the hall and doorways."

As for the wedding gifts displayed in the bride's home, when the honeymoon was over there would have been time enough for storing them away in logical places. Into a cupboard would go the dishes, napkins, salt and pepper stand, hand-painted dessert and berry dishes and decorated plates.

The hanging lamp and French clock (with bronze) were certainly useful, as were the painting and steel engraving, the pin cushion, perfume case, mittens and fancy sachet. Even the mustache cup would have found its place in the kitchen cupboard.

The question remains: Where was the new Mrs. Rogers going to put the cuspidor she and her husband received?

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